

Chicago Tribune

Practical magic Cold comforts

Gloves, hats, scarves -- she's gotta have them. But infuse them with some practical magic.

Accessories, by definition, add completeness, convenience or attractiveness to an outfit. Rather than depend on the merely practical, people who make it through winter with a smile on their face and admiring glances in their wake choose to elevate the utilitarian with a shot of posh or a touch of whimsy.

"Scarves, hats and gloves not only provide a function but they complete a look, and the bonus is that they never go out of style, as they can be resurrected from your closet every year," said Alexandra Wilkis Wilson, founder of Gilt Groupe, a members-only online shopping community. "They can make a simple outfit look like it has been accessorized by an astute stylist."

With so many options, giving a winter warmer as a holiday gift is likely to elicit immediate delight and ongoing gratitude from the wearer.

Eternal chic

Scarves have evolved from standard-issue mufflers to year-round must-haves, beloved by celebrities and frequent travelers alike for their ability to transform the simplest of separates into something special. Oversize yet lightweight styles from Louis Vuitton are a versatile investment. A fresh option is a knit collar known as an infinity scarf, which is a circle with no tails, or a more compact chunky knit collar. "Infinity scarves look fresh and new," retail consultant Jane Hamill says. "One of these will update your whole wardrobe."

Louis Vuitton taupe polka dot scarf, \$745, at Louis Vuitton, 919 N. Michigan Ave., 312-944-2010. Loro Piana purple scarf, \$540, at Neiman Marcus, 737 N. Michigan Ave., 312-642-5900.

From the top

Generate heat rather than losing it with a hat that projects personality plus. "Even with a plain coat, a hat adds instant total style," Hamill says.

Tonya Gross "Pin Up" purple hat, price on request, at tonya.grossmillinery.com, 773-988-0279. Lola ivory studded tam hat, \$125, at Neiman Marcus, 737 N. Michigan Ave., 312-642-5900.

At length

Longer gloves in a color other than black or brown add a sense of the fanciful to this winter necessity. Lavender, the sleeper-hit hue of the season, has an unexpected freshness. Also consider bright hues or pale neutrals. Gilt Groupe's Wilkis Wilson suggests having fun with aubergine or a rich jewel tone. And she points out, "Fingerless gloves, ideally in cashmere, are a must-have for iPhone users."

Neiman Marcus label cashmere ivory fingerless gloves, \$110, at Neiman Marcus, 737 N. Michigan Ave., 312-642-5900. Bloomingdale's purple leather gloves, \$129, at Bloomingdale's, 900 N. Michigan Ave., 312-440-4460.

Hot for the holidays

Real or faux, cropped or long, affordable or high-end, "the hottest layering piece this season is a little faux fur vest," Redbook fashion director Audrey Slater said.

Intrigued but not looking for a big commitment? There are options at every price point.

For \$49.50, American Eagle Outfitters offers a weekend-rugged brown furry vest, below, lined in red plaid, available in the Water Tower Place store, 835 N. Michigan Ave., ae.com.

For \$62.99 each, J.C. Penney has two dressier options, an I (Heart) Ronson brown faux fur vest with black faux leather belt and a Bisou Bisou charcoal faux fur front-zip vest with tie-waist belt. See jcp.com.

For \$150, Armani Exchange has a zip-front chevron-cut faux fur vest with an attached hood. See armaniexchange.com.

On the investment end of the spectrum, Intermix carries a Vince lamb fur vest, \$795, and a Karl Donoghue knitted lamb fur vest, \$1,275. See intermixonline.com.

As for how you wear it, that's wide-open for interpretation -- casually with jeans, daringly bare-armed with leather pants (another hot trend) or conservatively with a sweater and pencil skirt. Or different ways on different days -- which is part of the appeal.

Whatever your pleasures, core warmth will be one.

-- Wendy Donahue

The looks

On the cover: Zara gray vest, \$189, and black leather pants, \$189, both at Zara, 700 N. Michigan Ave., 312-255-8123 Tory Burch "Foster" silk interlock dress with sparkling detachable bib necklace, \$495 at Tory Burch, 66 E. Walton St., toryburch.com, 312-280-0010. Elizabeth and James black horsehair booties, \$470, at Nordstrom, 55 E. Grand Ave., 312-464-1515.

On this page: Haute Hippie vest, \$895, at Nordstrom, 55 E. Grand Ave., 312-464-1515. Zara black leather pants, \$189, and Zara cream silk shirt, \$89.90, both at Zara, 700 N. Michigan Ave., 312-255-8123. Elizabeth and James black horsehair booties, \$470, at Nordstrom, 55 E. Grand Ave. H&M black belt, \$24.95, at H&M, 20 N. State St., 312-263-4436.

Tribune photos by Chris Walker. Model: Amelia Pool/Ford. Stylist: Tony Bryan/Ford. Hair and makeup: Morgan Blaul/Artists by Timothy Priano.