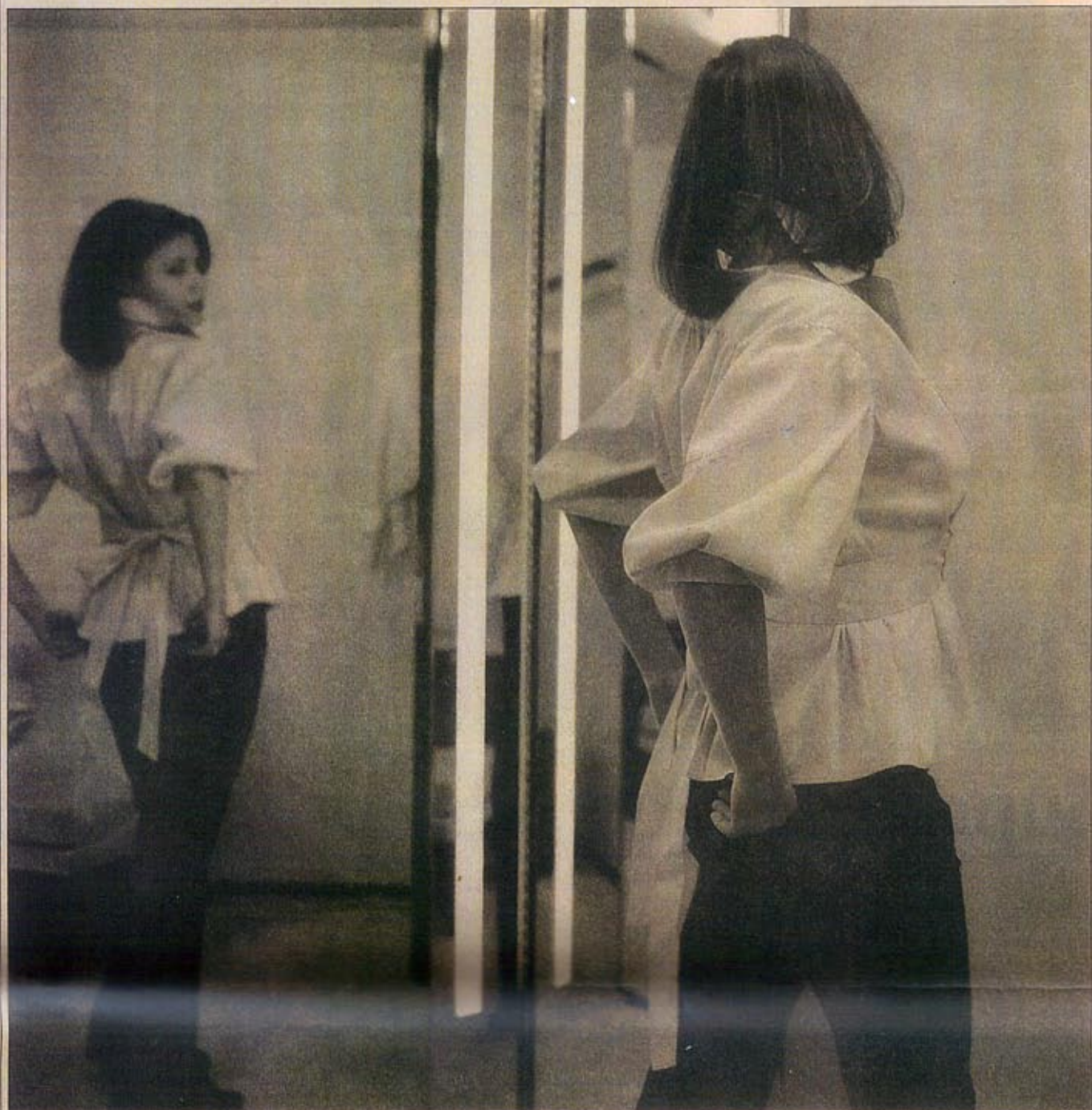


Stay ahead of the curves

It's time to big it up. **Tatiana Boncompagni** seeks advice on how to turn up the volume on your clothes



Does my top look big in this? Tatiana Boncompagni tries out some clothes

Pascal Perich

Recently an editor from an American fashion magazine asked me to lunch. The plan was for me to pitch her ideas for future articles while eating and proving myself not to be a complete dullard. You'd think that producing a list of killer ideas or not spilling any food down my front would have been what worried me but, instead, I was most concerned with what I was going to wear. I had given birth to my second child four weeks before and was feeling more than a little top heavy.

A very fashionable, very flat-chested friend was over to see my newborn when I received the invitation for lunch. Gesticulating wildly at my chest, I grumbled: "How can I look chic with these?"

She laughed off my anxiety with a flick of her delicate wrist. "Oh stop," she said. "Let's just go shopping." So after packing up the changing bag and putting the baby into her carrier, we high-tailed it to Bergdorf Goodman's fifth floor. I perused a number of options: a Marc by

Marc Jacobs trapeze top in ivory silk; a cosy, tunic-length sweater from Vince; and a See by Chloé mini-dress in a cheery, vibrant print. Since none of the pieces were the least bit fitted, I assumed they would be very forgiving on my forgiveness-needing frame.

Boy, was I wrong. The trapeze top, voluminous sweater and mini-dress — all so chic on their hangers — turned into giant potato sacks on my post-partum body. "You could always wear a black turtleneck and straight leg pants," my friend said soothingly. I went home that day licking my wounds.

It turns out that a lot of other shoppers have similar problems. Marshal Cohen, chief industry analyst for The NPD Group, a market research company, says: "Fashion is about creating something to incentivise the consumer. So when we see tunic tops and skinny jeans and leggings that most people can't and more often shouldn't wear, we end up in this place where fashion is not wearable."

That's especially true when

you're working with Jayne Mansfield-like proportions in a season made for Twiggy. Again, I'm not alone. According to Stephanie Rabinowitz, vice-president of sales and marketing for bra manufacturer Le Mystère, the company's bestselling bra is the Tisha in size 36D, featured on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* last year. It sells about half a million

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of these a year. "Our most popular sizes used to be 34B and C," says Rabinowitz.

In part, the increase in bra cup sizes can be blamed on the growing popularity of breast augmentation. Joanna Mastroianni, a New York-based fashion

designer whose high-end clothes sell at select Nordstrom stores, says she remembers the first time she went to Los Angeles for a trunk show in the early 1980s. "It was the first time I had seen such a variation in sizes from the top to the bottom. You'd have women with size four hips and size 12 tops. In most of the country, it was the other way around." Now, says Mastroianni, the same holds true for other markets such as Dallas and Miami.

Shoshanna Lonstein Gruss, the beautiful and busty brunette behind the Shoshanna line of dresses and swimwear, advises me to look for dresses with a little structure on the top, like her take on the tent dress that comes with strategic dart seams underneath the chest. "It's not a true tent but it does have some volume," she says.

Another hint: pair the dress or top with a heavy, long necklace that will weigh down the fabric and keep the eye moving in a vertical line.

"There's no way someone can say 'never do volume,'" says

Rachel Roy, the designer behind her eponymous line of socialite-friendly trench coats, dresses and separates. "Until you try it on, you don't know. Try a slouchy sweater that falls off the shoulder. Add a belt but do it low slung."

"In general, if you are curvy it looks great to emphasize the waist using things with an A-line shape on bottom," says Annie Jagger, Salma Hayek's LA-based stylist. "Look for fitted tops with some volume on the bottom to balance out the look. But make sure the volume is proportioned well."

"Things that work on thinner girls, larger-chested women should stay away from," warns Jason Wu, who designed the dress actress Eva Longoria wore to this year's Emmy awards ceremony and whose first collection of 1960s-inspired frocks is in Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus stores. "Large-chested women have to wear clothes that have a little more structure on top. Stay away from the drapey stuff."

OK, I think I got it now.