

Q Dear Marylou: Whatever happened to the car coat? I drive to and from work, and would love to find a fingertip-length coat for my daily commute. Can you help?__P.F.F., Cold Spring Harbor, NY.



Dear P.F.F.: The **car coat has transmogrified into the pea coat.** Or, given the fact that the pea coat predates the car coat (it first got fashion time in the early 19th Century when it was shanghaied from sailors for general use) you could say the pea coat grandfathered the car coat. The pea coat, named for the Dutch word *pij* for the heavy wool **melton** cloth used in the double-breasted, anchor-buttoned jackets worn by sailors, is see-worthy with pants, leggings and skirts, and it could even look quirky with full-skirted evening dresses or as a kind of tuxedo substitute with black satin pants dressed up with a metallic scarf and metallic slippers.

Legend has it that the dapper **Count Alfred d'Orsay** got caught in the rain without a coat and bought this sailor's jacket from a swabby. With his imprimatur, the pea coat left the sea for fashion shores.

Q Dear Marylou: Now that gloves are back, how about giving us some guidelines on what type of glove is proper with what type of outfit?__U.W., Staten Island, NY.

Dear U.W.: **The length of gloves should coordinate with sleeve lengths.** Short gloves, for example, are worn with long sleeves, and the longest gloves are worn with bare-shouldered ballgowns.

In **glove language**, length is measured in terms of buttons—each button measuring about 1 in. from the base of the thumb up the arm. A 16-button glove, for example, which is considered proper for formal gowns, extends about 16 in. from the base of the thumb, usually ending between the elbow and shoulder on most women.

When wearing gloves with a coat, it is considered “improper” (is anything really improper now?) to show skin between glove and sleeve. Because many of the new coats are designed with bracelet-length sleeves (it’s the **Cristobal Balenciaga** influence), elbow-length gloves have once more elbowed their way into fashion. With sleeveless daytime clothes or dinner dresses (not long ballgowns), glove etiquette says that you may wear gloves that are either very short or very long.

Q Dear Marylou: The skirt of my expensive satin evening dress was torn at the hem by my klutzy dance partner (aka my husband.) It’s a slender dress, and I don’t think it would look good if I shortened it to lower calf, the length required to get rid of the tear. Any ideas?__M.J., Newark, NY.

Dear M.J.: How about **replacing the torn part** with a wide satin band in a contrasting color? If satin doesn’t appeal to you, consider tulle, horsehair or even fur. If you happen to own one of the **oblong mink stoles** of ‘50s memory, or can find one at a vintage shop, give it a new life as a festive **hemband**.

Q Dear Marylou: I found some beautiful Hawaiian shirts made of rayon in my favorite vintage clothing shop, but I’m not sure how or if I can launder them. Any advice?__J.L.R., Royal Oak, MI.

Dear J.L.R.: **Vintage clothing specialist Terry McCormick** says that during the development of rayon there was much experimentation with dyeing methods, and some were more successful than others. While modern dyed rayon seldom, if ever, runs, **vintage rayon** is another story.

McCormick says you should first do a brief (half hour to one hour max) presoak in a weak solution of peroxys bleach and warm water. Then wash by hand in lukewarm water, using Woolite or Ivory Snow. I especially love this tip from McCormick: “When using Ivory Snow in lukewarm water, dissolve it first in very hot water, then add to the lukewarm solution. Rinse thoroughly, roll in towel until damp dry, then press.” Rayon irons best when damp, says this expert, who cautions that sprays should not be used because rayon tends to water-spot. She recommends ironing on the wrong side to avoid shine.

(Marylou welcomes questions for use in this column, but regrets she cannot answer mail personally. Send your questions to info@fqi.org.)

