

# NO SKIRTING THE ISSUE

Designers are cutting up the cloth ceiling and turning their attention to the travelling female business executive, says Lauren Steventon

While all sorts of high-performance travel-friendly suits are being dangled in front of male executives, it can be much trickier for their jet-setting female counterparts who want to exude style and a sense of purpose at 35,000 feet as well as on the ground.

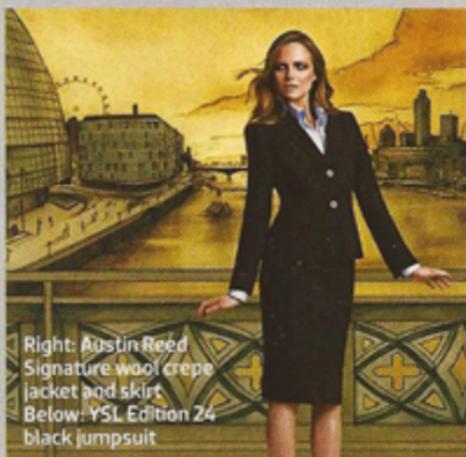
Some fabrics certainly travel better than others. While the women's skirt version of Austin Reed's Performance fabric suit – a single-breasted number in black, navy or charcoal – is apparently the British High Street brand's bestseller, it won't make anywhere near as much impact as a classic jersey or silk-blend dress from Diane von Furstenberg's Fall 2010 or Wrap Dress collections, which will be comfortable, won't crease, and can take the wearer from border control to boardroom. Plus a simple dress is easy to dress up if you have no time to change before your evening engagement.

Cashmere works terrifically well in the air – it is a definite improvement on the airline's blanket when the air conditioning kicks in and more and more designers are turning to this versatile fabric for sleek and sexy outfits.

Tania Laurie was one of the first names to inject some feminine style into cashmere, setting up her eponymous company in 1997. This year's autumn/winter collection features some fitted dresses in (travel-friendly) purple or grey, and a sharp pinstriped suit with wide trousers.

Laurie herself swears by the material for travelling: "I always wear comfortable trousers, a T-shirt, a shirt and a cashmere bomber jacket. Then as soon as I get on the plane I put on my cashmere sleep suit, an elegant pair of wide-leg drawstring cashmere trousers with matching tunic top. If I'm really cold I'll put my bomber jacket on top and slip on a pair of cashmere socks."

The clothes that work best are the clothes that work hard when travelling light. Yves Saint Laurent's Edition 24, for example, is a capsule collection of 24 pieces that can be combined into a number of different outfits. Perfect for efficient travel



Right: Austin Reed Signature wool crepe jacket and skirt  
Below: YSL Edition 24 black jumpsuit

enlivened with a splash of designer know-how. The collection features both staple and statement pieces, channelling YSL's wearable yet on-trend looks. This season's Edition includes a smart black jumpsuit, a bright purple short-sleeved jacket and skirt, and mix-and-match jackets, skirts and trousers in beiges and golds.

But there are technological and design advances in classic clothing too. Increasingly, designers are turning to alternative or practical fabrics in order to combine form with function and create some lightweight alternatives to hefty coats. Burberry's Double-breasted Packaway Trench Coat is fashioned in nylon which actually makes it easy to carry or pack while still maintaining Burberry's classic cut. Similarly, Max Mara's Weekend collection is designed for travel, with pieces such as quilted jackets for less weight and more warmth.

Every woman knows she shouldn't wear heels on the plane ... or sprinting across a concourse ... or running for a cab. Which is why, since their launch in 2009, savvy female travellers have been snapping up Butterfly Twist's lightweight, ultra-comfortable ballet-style foldable pumps to wear until they are ready to squeeze into their power shoes once again. These slip snugly into your briefcase next to your MacBook.

Naturally, your MacBook deserves to travel in style too. Mulberry's Bayswater bag has a padded section for 33cm laptops and room for everything else you might reasonably need to hand.

