

April 5, 2009

**Q** My husband just got promoted into a very public and important job. What should I wear when I attend events with him? He is also shorter than me. Should I ditch the heels when we try to present a united front?



## ASK THE STYLIST

**SOPHIE HEXTER** PICTURES MIKE BAKER

Little  
Tailleur  
shift, \$506



I know more about Michelle Obama's sartorial savvy than I do about her political stratagem. Ditto with Carla Bruni-Sarkozy, Queen Rania of Jordan and the late Jackie O (nee Kennedy).

Granted that's probably because I work in fashion, but it's also because these WOPs (Wives Of Presidents) give good style. With scope. Think about it: is a great dress really just a great dress when you're married to a head of state? Doesn't it, like, become a symbol of social and political significance imbued with hidden messages of your husband's political intent?

Take Michelle Obama's inauguration outfit. A yellow dress and coat by Isabel Toledo. The colour signified hope and optimism in the face of global gloom and doom. Designed by a Cuban-born, American-based designer, it highlighted her husband's open-arm policy on racial and cultural diversity. Her accessories? Leather gloves from J.Crew — a local equivalent would be Country Road or Cue — put her on par with the people by revealing she's no stranger to fast fashion. And her Jimmy Choo shoes — a luxury London-based label started by a Chinese immigrant — completed the international back-slapping.

It's a similar scenario with the Italian-born Bruni-Sarkozy, who's habitually dressed in Dior to

show her allegiance to her husband's homeland. And her feet — reader take note — are perpetually shod in flats so as to avoid emphasising her husband's shortfalls (pun, obviously, intended).

Generally speaking, these First Ladies of Fashion tend to favour dresses. Knee-length and shift-like for day and floor-length with wow factor for glam slam evening events. Tailored trousers are appropriate when partnered with a smart blouse and jacket. You should consider local labels such as Carla Zampatti, Martin Grant, Willow, Witchery and Cue for day and Alex Perry, Collette Dinnigan, George Gross and Harry Who for night. Worn back with internationally branded accessories, it's the ultimate in good taste and global diplomacy.

And, just in case you're wondering, US papers recently ran headlines questioning whether it was OK for Michelle Obama to "bare arms". That's limbs, not guns, by the way. And the answer? Yes. To both actually, when you factor in the Second Amendment. As I inferred, First Lady fashion is complicated. And you thought getting dressed was hard?

Style woes? Let Sophie sort them out.  
Stylist@theage.com.au

Martin  
Grant  
dress,  
\$1999



Witchery  
pullover,  
\$129.95



Witchery  
pants,  
\$149.95

Longines  
watch,  
\$3700

Paul &  
Joe dress,  
\$750



Filippo  
Raphael  
ballet  
flat, \$275,  
from Edward  
Meller



Oliver  
Goldsmith  
sunglasses,  
\$450



Hermes  
notebook,  
\$1550

### STOCKISTS

David Jones 9643 2222  
Edward Meller 1800 771 466  
Hermes 9654 5571  
Little Tailleur 0418 216 024  
Longines: enquiries to The Swatch Group 8844 3300  
Paul & Joe 9421 2688  
Witchery 1800 640 249  
witchery.com.au

Stylist's assistant: Emily Ward

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Published in The Sunday Age

THE SUNDAY AGE

