

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a white button-down blouse and a dark, knee-length skirt, stands in a room. She is looking towards the camera. To her right is a clothing rack filled with dark-colored garments. In the background, there is a window with blinds and a lamp on a table. The room has wooden floors and a doorway is visible on the left.

# THE RADAR FASHION

BY REBECCA HESLIN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY POWERS AND CREWE

Of her lack of design school training, lobbyist and newly turned fashion designer Rochelle Behrens quips, "Most design students haven't worked in a fluorescent-lit office."

## CLOTHING THE GENDER GAP

*DC fashionista Rochelle Behrens helps Capitol Hill's hot winks mind their gape*

Once upon a time, a former Clinton White House intern, armed with a fierce fashion sense and a proclivity for making headlines, turned the question of cleavage into a hot-button issue. No—it's not the salacious story you're thinking of. It's the tale of a 26-year-old lobbyist-by-day, fashion-designer-by-night who solved a problem that had vexed a generation of buxom Beltway bombshells. That is: How to spare a Capitol Hill power player from the embarrassment of unintended peekaboo cleavage.

"In a way I've solved a problem that many males don't necessarily see as a problem," jokes first-time designer Rochelle Behrens, who this month launches her first full-fledged fall collection of tailored fashions that look as good at rush hour on K Street as they do at happy hour on U. "The cornerstone piece of the collection is, and will always be, the gape-free shirt," Behrens says. While her signature blouse is scoring cheers from the female faction in town, she's certainly been hearing the jeers of local masters of the universe. But so what? Championing appropriate office wear is hardly a wedge issue.

Minding the gaping gap in her button-down blouse was a constant frustration for this federal fashionista. "I've always had to pin between the offending buttons," the San Diego native says. "Since I knew how to solve the problem, I had to do it." To make her prototype work, Behrens refashioned the standard shirt by pulling in the shoulders, making the fit slim and increasing the bust. In solving her own problem, she launched a fashion line.

With liquid saved from bonuses, as well as some seed money from Dad, Behrens has launched an office-ready line that promises to put a feminine polish on local politicians. "I wanted to do a little bit more for shape and sheen,

but make a collection that's still classic," she says. "My line creates a modern version of styles from the '40s and '60s." Focusing on darker knits and accents like leather buttons, the line ups its edge but maintains a level of sophistication for work. "It's really a reaction to the boho, linguine fashions that have been out for years," she says. In place of pretty, Behrens presents power. Not just in look, but by association, as well. She shares a pattern maker with Ashley Olsen, Alice & Olivia and Catherine Malandrino. And if the fabric of her ready-to-work wear looks familiar, it's because DVF picked some of the same.

It may have been her own dressing debacle that inspired her collection, but before this West Coaster headed East to study politics and art history at the University of Pennsylvania, she learned from her mom's glam slam in the style department. "My mom was always in heels and a black skirt. Always," Behrens says. "She really taught me about editing and the power of a fierce skirt. I learned about fit from her." The two often shopped together, pounding the pavement in pursuit of fashion. No matter which coast they were scouring for stylish work wear, they always encountered the same predicament. "We've window shopped for as long as I can remember and all we'd ever see were party dresses," she says. "People often think you have to wear those super cute, often office-inappropriate dresses to be sexy. But there's a level of dressing for work that can still be made sexy, just in a more conservative way."

After stints at *W* magazine and in Clinton's second term, Behrens tried to merge her dualities into one antithetical posh politico. But years of heading to the Hill in boardroom basics took their toll, and this stylist was bored. Now an associate at Quinn Gillespie & Associates, Behrens tried her hand at a small-run production during Congress's summer recess. The "recess collection" gave way to some polling data, *natch*, and the brand's debut campaign presents a palette of refined, sexy silhouettes for fall.

Her signature chic sheath is a hot candidate for politicians with haute social agendas. And for the statesmen in her life? "Maybe down the road I'll make a men's shirt with the same concept, except put the extra buttons lower to cover a paunch," she jokes. "No one likes to look over when a man's sitting in a meeting and see that!" ■

*To purchase pieces, go to [www.rochellebehrencollection.com](http://www.rochellebehrencollection.com).*