

The Dress Fits

THE FASHION INDUSTRY HAS A LONG HISTORY OF IGNORING CUSTOMERS WHO AREN'T SAMPLE SIZE. BUT THAT'S CHANGING—FINALLY. AND WITH THIS MONTH'S LAUNCH OF GOOP X UNIVERSAL STANDARD, WE COULDN'T BE PROUDER TO BE A PART OF THAT CHANGE.

By Meirav Devash — Photographs by Tiffany Nicholson — Styling by Doria Santlofer



Top row, on both:
goop x Universal
Standard blazer,
\$335, and pants,
\$225; goop.com.
Second row, on both:
goop x Universal
Standard dress,
\$295; goop.com.
Right: Jimmy Choo
shoes, \$995;
jimmychoo.com.
Bottom row: goop x
Universal Standard
blazer, \$335, and
pants, \$225; goop.com. Manolo
Blahnik shoes, \$725;
manoloblahnik.com.

I used to work at a glossy women's magazine in midtown Manhattan, across the street from a big clothing store. When my colleague accidentally sat in ketchup, she dashed across the street and arrived at our staff meeting in a lovely new shift dress. When I tore the back seam of my skirt, I had to tie a cardigan around my waist and lurk in a corner all day. See, I was a size 16, and she was a size 4.

An estimated 68 percent of US women wear a size 14 and up. Still, we're segregated into two populations: the under-14s and the over-14s. A recent Quartz analysis of denim at the Mall of America found that only 13 percent of jeans would fit a woman of average size or larger. "There's nothing out there—it's as simple as that," says Alexandra Waldman, a cofounder and the creative director of Universal Standard, the cult clothing brand lauded for its modern pieces sized 00 through 40. (This month, goop is launching goop x Universal Standard, a line of six pieces in sizes 00 [4XS] to 40 [4XL].) "What's available to you at size 4 and size 24 is day and night," she says. That void leaves an untapped market opportunity that Coresight Research estimates at about \$46 billion. "Maybe that's why some shops are struggling," muses Patrick Herning, the founder of 11 Honoré, an e-commerce site for plus-size luxury fashion. "Many brands aren't moving fast enough to provide options." To some extent, the fashion industry doesn't want to dress plus-size women (only 0.1 percent of higher-end apparel is plus-size, according to recent data from the research firm Edited). Some designers buck the trend: Zac Posen, Marina Rinaldi, and Christian Siriano—who reported that adding plus sizes to his line tripled his business—come to mind. Maybe there are residual "you can't sit with us" vibes, but that's not the whole story.

Sizing up isn't easy. OG plus-size brand Lane Bryant, founded in 1904, has collected over a century's worth of fit data about its customers and employs an in-house technical design team of "lots of people whose job it is to obsess over body proportions," says Malissa Akay, Lane Bryant's senior vice president and general merchandise manager. For brands starting out, "there's a huge learning curve," says Waldman. To begin with, you have to create totally new patterns. Typically, clothes are designed on a size 6, then graded down to 0 and up to 14. "The proper way to size up

past size 14 is to fit on a size 18, then grade up or down from there," says Herning. Using a formula to grade across a wide spectrum of sizes doesn't work because women don't always get taller or grow longer arms the bigger they get. "If you use the same formula to go from a 4 to a 24, your shorts are culottes," says Waldman. There's also a dearth of pattern-makers with the right experience—fashion students learn to design on straight-size mannequins. Above size 14, there's more "variation in body topography," as Waldman puts it. Designers have to know their customer. Is she large in the waist or pear-shaped? Does she have wide arms? Every time

you winnow the fit, you're limiting—one reason so many plus-size dresses resemble circus tents.

Then there are the factories. Many aren't equipped to weave fabric wide enough for clothing over a certain size. You might be able to Frankenstein fabrics together to create a garment, but it would have weird seams. Plus, "a size 32 requires more fabric, and you have to charge the same price," Waldman says. None of these challenges are insurmountable, says Herning. For example, 11 Honoré partners with designers like Marchesa and Jason Wu to create and sell capital-F fashion for larger sizes. And Universal Standard uses a different fit model for every size. (This prevents the type of ridiculousness seen when the same collar used on a size 4 shirt dress looks doll-size on a 24.) And Universal Standard's online shop has See It in Your Size, which allows you to see garments on a model in your size, not sample size. "We choose models at every size so customers can compare how things fit across the size spectrum," Waldman says.

When I first saw Universal Standard's clean, tailored silhouettes, I felt...confused. They might have been my size, but they clearly weren't for me. The designs looked more like Rag & Bone than anything from my usual "curve" brands. I'm always on some kind of diet, so I'm wary of investing in clothes because I "won't be this size for long." When I saw one of my friends, who weighs over 200 pounds, at the beach in the Geneva dress, the brand's original bestseller, I realized the problem was me: My personal style has evolved around limits instead of real fashion choices. But I could change that—and I will. In fact, my husband and I are going to a dinner party next week. And come to think of it, I do need a new dress. ●

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goop x Universal
Standard
dress, \$295;
goop.com. Stuart
Weitzman boots,
\$798; stuart
weitzman.com.

To shop a selection of items from this story, text UNIVERSAL to 23955.



goop x Universal
Standard jumpsuit,
\$295; [goop.com](https://www.goop.com).



goop x Universal
Standard coat,
\$395; goop.com.
Right: Custom
top by Universal
Standard. Below:
goop x Universal
Standard blazer,
\$335, and pants,
\$225; goop.com.
Jimmy Choo
shoes, \$995;
jimmychoo.com.





Left: goop x Universal Standard dress, \$295, goop.com. Jimmy Choo shoes, \$995; jimmychoo.com. Center: goop x Universal Standard dress, \$295, goop.com. Manolo Blahnik shoes, \$745; barneys.com. Right: goop x Universal Standard blazer, \$335, and pants, \$225; goop.com. Manolo Blahnik shoes, \$725; manoloblahnik.com.

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Standard dress,
\$295; goop.com.
Stuart Weitzman
boots, \$598; stuartweitzman.com.

