

THE BIG EASY. Enchanted nights out start with a glorified tank top in bright crocheted lace dazzled with rhinestones (3.1 Phillip Lim, \$425). An exposed zipper in back introduces a whimsical "I'm wearing this inside out" effect, while fluttery sleeves allow freedom of movement (and flatter the upper-arm area). For more formal moments, step it up with a grand silk skirt (CH Carolina Herrera, \$940)—Mol loved the unexpected clash of orange and red—but this top is so casually glamorous, you could also wear it under a jacket for a swift office-to-evening switch. Earrings, House of Lavande. Ring, Jill Jacobson. Shoes, Rene Caovilla.



EMBRACING *Lace*

If you thought lace was just for brides, grandmothers, and girly-girls, think again: The latest takes on this captivating fabric—whether cobwebby and delicate or rich and dense—are unmistakably modern. Actress Gretchen Mol, star of the new ABC series *Life on Mars*, lets herself be seduced.



Photographs By Fabrizio Ferri

THE TONE IS SENSUOUS. "This dress is very sexy but understated," says actress Gretchen Mol. The café au lait beige suggests a second skin—yet this slip of a dress (Monique Lhuillier) doesn't look like lingerie because the lace is denser, more textured (the kind designers now favor). Mol's life currently involves two major roles: mother to 1-year-old Ptolemy ("I liked the sound of it, kind of lyrical, but his middle name is John.") and playing a 1970s policewoman on *Life on Mars* (it's a cop show crossed with a time-travel fantasy). Earrings, W/A Studios. Bracelet, J.Crew. Shoes, Rene Caovilla.



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RUST MENSWEAR to toughen lace just enough so its sweetness doesn't cloy. A wool tweed sheath trimmed in black (Diane von Furstenberg, \$465) fuses masculine and feminine elements, while accessories—Moorish-style earrings and necklace (LK Designs by Leetal Kalmanson), a clutch with oversize eyelet appliqués (Miu Miu)—are lacy in their own way. How women relate to this powerfully female fabric, or to fashion in general, changes as life's priorities change: A "huge identity shift" like motherhood, Mol says, affects everything from body image to which boots to buy ("I'm going to be in the park with Ptolemy a lot this winter. I don't think I'll be wearing Louboutin..."). Ring, M.C.L. by Matthew Campbell Laurenza.



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AVING LACE from the fate of a thrift-shop dinosaur, contemporary designers are using it in totally accessible styles like this nicely priced black pencil skirt (Banana Republic, \$110). It's lined with blush satin, which brings out the beauty of the pattern (and spares you anxiety about the right lingerie), and supplied, rather surprisingly, with pockets, which make the skirt feel more like sportswear. Count on it to bring freshness and delicacy to anything you wear, whether that's a drapey silk blouse (Vince, \$195) or, more informally, a turtleneck and opaque hose. Earrings and bracelet, R.J. Graziano. Watch, Baume & Mercier. Shoes, Dani Black.

A LUSH SKIRT lavished with rosettes, plus a matching chain bag (Prada), epitomize fashion's new, more forceful take on lace (here it's the heavy-duty embroidered variety known as guipure). The weighty, ropelike effect and deep, rich color make these pieces eminently compatible with casual clothes like knits (sweater, Christopher Fischer, \$220). "I'd love to dress like this every day," Mol says. "It's so bold and chic." But for now that dream is purely aspirational: "I'm more interested in a uniform I don't have to think about—something I can get baby food on." Earrings, C. Greene. Ring, Jill Jacobson. Shoes, Miu Miu.



“Lace
is such an
accompaniment
of women,
through childhood,
marriage, and
being a widow, ”

MIUCCIA PRADA has said about her fall 2008 collection, which jump-started the revival of this intricate fabric.

*L*ACE GETS A DRESSING-DOWN with—you guessed it—jeans (Fidelity Denim, \$188). They give a whiff of hipness to an ethereal blouse with flouncy sleeves and a cinched waist (Robert Rodriguez, \$319). An edgy metal, jet bead, and crystal necklace (Erickson Beamon) only increases the cool factor: "The chains and denim make the lace feel very strong," says Mol. On the subject of underpinnings: The fabric's complex patterns form a sort of screen, so sometimes you can get away with just a bra, but more modest coverage, like a nude slip or camisole, is always an option. Earrings, Rachel Reinhardt. Ring, De Beers.



A WOW BELT—this lace-embellished leather cincher (Melamed)—is a smart buy, given the popularity of waist-conscious, vintage-inspired styles. The wholesome-looking dress in a lacy print (Mischen, \$625) reminds Mol of “a ‘50s lady humming at the sink.” A touch of demure, pretty mom dressing is fun, she says; even better are roles that draw on motherhood’s emotional content, like her character in *The Memory Keeper’s Daughter*. “I read it while I was pregnant and suspected they’d make it into a movie. And right after Ptolemy was born—when I was wondering if I’d ever work again—I got the call.” Earrings, Rachel Reinhardt. Ring, Martine Wester. Bag, Elaine Turner.

MODERN LACE:

The Rules

The challenge: Take a sweet, somewhat dated material and make it hip and current. Designers have done it; now it’s your turn. Here are four ways to work lace into your wardrobe.

🔗 **Pick streamlined shapes**—a pencil skirt, a tank top—rather than anything elaborately detailed. The fabric should be the star.

🔗 **Loosen things up by combining lace pieces with tailored clothes** (a cobwebby little top under a suit is terrific for work-to-party transitions) or sleek dark jeans (lovely for a more casual evening).

🔗 **Think accents**—a cool shoe, bag, belt, or scarf. All-over lace often looks too fussy and “mother of the bride”; lacy accessories are a low-risk way to put a fanciful spin on a simple dress or suit.

🔗 **Be cautiously colorful:** Pastels often read as hyperfeminine, while bright colors can easily look cheap. Black, white, or cream—the classics—are safe; or try neutrals like gray, navy, and brown.



LATE NIGHT ON Turner Classics and you’re watching a black-and-white film with knockout costumes...this fragile yet commanding gown (Sari Gueron), with its Old Hollywood aura, would fit right in. “Sometimes I’m in the mood for another decade,” says Mol, whose fashion icons include the Hepburns, Katharine and Audrey. But unlike real vintage—often a little too boned and stiff to be wearable—modern evening dresses are built to be comfortable: “I don’t feel weighed down in this,” Mol says. The delectable halter means a necklace would be too much; a few gunmetal bangles (R.J. Graziano) and a soigné flower-shaped ring (Cartier) are enough. Shoes, Jimmy Choo. *For details see Shop Guide.*

Fashion editor: Jenny Capitan. Hair: Mitch Barry for Bryan Bantry. Makeup: Fulvia Farolfi for Chanel. Set design: James Massenburg for Oliver Piro. Manicure: Roseann Singleton.

