



Question for Alisa Neely What are the top five clothing items newcomers need?

Alisa Neely is a fashion consultant. Learn more at StyleScout.net.

1. A pair of well-tailored black pants like Prada's Techno pant from Saks Fifth Avenue or J.Crew's city-fit wool gabardine trouser.
2. Black pencil skirt like Club Monaco's high-waisted pencil skirt or Helmut Lang's gleaming wool pencil skirt.
3. Jeans of any cut so long as they flatter your body type. A straight leg is almost universally complementary while a skinny leg should only be worn by the slim legged or tucked into boots. For a casually professional look, consider a trouser-style pair.
4. Warm yet sophisticated winter coat that can be paired with either jeans or a skirt. A Mackage trench coat or winter coat from Saks Fifth Avenue would work.
5. Cold-weather boots, like Fiorentini+Baker's 704 Buckle Boot or Roberto del Carlo's flat leather knee boot from Barneys, that are versatile enough to go with the above items.

LINH TRAN BRINCAT

Nick and Choose { NICK ALTSCHULLER }

SNEAKY SUPPER

Dinner done "Underground"



WE HAVE HAD OUR EYE ON YOU," the letter said. "Due to your history of good taste and bold nature, you have been selected by the conspirators as a potential guest." Sure, the note wasn't addressed to me, but my editor could read between the lines. Valued as the guy who tries the offal or polishes off last week's sushi from the office fridge, I was dispatched to a clandestine dinner presented by "The Underground."

Secret supper clubs are sprouting up nationwide. The reason for the cloak-and-dagger routine is it's illegal to charge for food from an uninsured, uninspected kitchen. As we've established, I'm not a real germaphobe, and I assumed someone at the party knew the Heimlich, so that just left me to RSVP and agree to the \$100 admission fee. Soon after, I received a call informing me of the rendezvous point and dress code—"somewhere between James Bond and rock 'n' roll."

On the assigned day, I walked to the BPL wearing a stylish suit and a concealed Beretta. Using her keen eye for detail, my dining companion, photo editor Katie Noble, spotted our fellow guests: a small huddle dressed for hipster prom. The first person I met introduced himself as "Blade." I was sure I'd misheard. Clearly this fellow with the pocket-square hadn't named himself after a deadly weapon. I checked by introducing him to Katie. To my delight, I'd heard right, and as they conversed, I smiled at the auspicious start to the night's entertainment.

Shuttled out to Newton, we gathered in the backyard of some well-to-dos and mingled over oysters. There were chefs, financiers, bar owners and a couple of young students agonizing over the gravity of their love lives. Thankfully, there was also a bar stocked with enough booze to intoxicate a T-Rex, and it was somewhere between Katie's second caipirinha and me daring her to climb into the tree house that word got round that our hosts were of the unwitting variety. Seems they'd run off to Asia, and their housesitter had fallen for the head chef's powers of persuasion.

He's a young guy, and even after 25 straight hours of prep, he exhibited the kind of boundless energy that makes you want to nap. The former sous chef, now a full-time musician, cofounded the Washburn Underground in 2005, because, as he says, "I come up with these ideas,



and I can make it happen, so I feel a duty." It's an endearing idealism, which miraculously doesn't make you want to throttle him.

In the dining room, I sat next to an amicable cattle farmer who went to culinary school in Bilbao. Katie sat next to Blade. (Yea!) The six-course meal began with a spring-roll salad and then presented a choice of "Rosas del Diablo" (a roulade of chicken, rasher and capicola) and "Les Ailes de Cieux" (deboned chicken wings stuffed with Dijon-Marsala mascarpone). I went for the wings: Tasty but topped with flakes of flavorless gold, they demonstrated how the chefs had exceeded the budget. Understaffed, the dishes came sporadically, but the beverages flowed with regularity. After the Southwest ravioli, the waitress whispered to me, "People are really getting toasted."

"I know," I responded, before ordering another glass of Rioja.

I won't say things devolved, but after we played a round of word games and a mute teenager banged out the Zelda theme on the piano, it became apparent that we'd gone down the rabbit hole. I'd been expecting a grown-up dinner party. What I got was adults playing dress up. The dishes were good, not gourmet, but playful—which was really the point. More than an ego stroke of ingredients and technique, the supper club offers a dining experience. This is Boston. Our restaurant meals don't end stumbling home at 4 am. For that you've got to go underground—off the puritanical radar for something both indulgent and genuine. It's a choice worth making. ***