



By Steve Shelton, AP

More than one look: Ella Gunderson, 11, didn't like the selection of clothing for girls her age at Nordstrom, so she wrote a letter asking for less-revealing choices. The store promised to provide a better variety.

Racy teen apparel gets tamed

Fall clothing expected to be a 'sexy take on a librarian'

By Kristen Gelineau
The Associated Press

REDMOND, Wash. — During a recent shopping trip to Nordstrom, 11-year-old Ella Gunderson became frustrated with all the low-cut hip-huggers and skin-tight tops.

So she wrote to the upscale Seattle-based chain's executives.

"I see all of these girls who walk around with pants that show their belly button and underwear," she wrote, in charming pre-teen style. "Your clerks suggest (sic) that there is only one look. If that is true, then girls are suppost (sic) to walk around half naked."

Nordstrom executives wrote back and promised Ella the company would try to provide a variety of fashions for young women.

The shy, bespectacled redhead has since become a media darling, appearing on national television over the past two weeks to promote modest fashions instead of the saucy looks popularized by the likes of Britney Spears.

Ella is on to something: A more modest look is in, some fashion experts say.

"We like to call this new girl Miss Modesty," says Gigi Solif Schanen, fashion editor at *Seventeen* magazine. "It's such a different feeling but still very pretty and feminine and sexy. It's just a little more covered up."

Schanen says shoppers are starting to see higher waistlines and lower hemlines in stores now. She says tweeds, fitted blazers and layers are expected to be big this fall.

"It's kind of like a sexy take on a librarian," Schanen says. "I think people are tired of seeing so much skin and want to leave a little more to the imagination."

The Web retailing sites for the extra modest ModestApparelUSA.com (for women and girls) and co-ed ModestByDesign.com — where the slogan is "Clothing your father would approve of" — report that sales have been growing over the past 18 months. Another site, www.wholesomewear.com, offers covered-up swimwear.

Many youngsters are frustrated by the profusion of racy teenage clothing, according to Buzz Marketing, a New Jersey-based firm that compiles feedback from teen advisers. "There is just sensory overload. Kids

are going to say, 'Enough already,'" says Buzz's 24-year-old CEO, Tina Wells. "The next big trend I see is kids are going to look like monks."

In 2002, a group of Arizona teens submitted a petition to the Phoenix division of the Dillard's department store chain asking for more modest clothes. The chain began carrying more conservative styles.

Nordstrom spokeswoman Deniz Anders says the company has been hearing for about two years from customers who want more modest looks, and Nordstrom tries to carry a broad array of styles in its stores.

The arrival of the modest look is good news for Ella, who last week participated in a sold-out "Pure Fashion" show in Bellevue, Wash., with 37 other girls belonging to a Roman Catholic youth organization.

Ella, who paraded down the catwalk in a long-sleeved pink top and a shiny pink skirt, hopes the fashion show — and her letter — prompts change.

"There can be more than one look," the youngster says in an interview while wearing a loose Pure Fashion T-shirt, jeans and hot-pink flip-flops. "Everybody should have lots of choices."

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— Gigi Solif Schanen,
Seventeen