

Houston Chronicle

January 15, 2005

Don't cry over spilled wine, ketchup

By Joy Sewing

Donna Barry was wearing a khaki skirt when she spilled red wine on her lap. Then she squirted on ketchup and threw in some yellow mustard. At any other time, she would have been considered a messy eater with a hefty dry-cleaning bill.

But Barry was trying to prove a point.

As an associate with a marketing company that represents Nano-Tex, a spill-resistant, quick-drying fabric treatment used by clothing manufacturers and retailers from Old Navy to Brooks Brothers, her goal was to sell me on the benefits of such technology. She had called weeks earlier to set up an appointment so that she could stop by my office, spill food on herself and demonstrate the wonders of technology.

I watched critically as Barry shook off the red wine onto a towel on the floor.

"No stain. It's like an umbrella of protection over the fabric," Barry said.

She was right, and the exchange prompted me to think about the many stain-resistant, wrinkle-resistant, odor-resistant and anything-else resistant fashions out there. In this no-iron, no-odor, no-spill and no-fuss society in which we live, what would we do without technology?

We would really be a smelly, messy and wrinkly lot.

I have a pile of white cotton shirts in my closet that I haven't worn for months because they need ironing, and I despise the task. So out of sheer laziness, I'll likely carry the bundle to a nearby dry cleaner for a professional press. Oh, how happy I would be if more women's clothes were wrinkle-free.

According to a survey by the Nano-Tex folks, 82 percent of Americans, like me, would be happier if more fabric-performance features, including stain-, odor-, wrinkle- and/or fade-resistance and perspiration control were used in their clothes. The survey also revealed that 56 percent of respondents admitted that spills and stains cause them to either walk around all day in stained clothes or change their clothes unexpectedly.

Textile scientists are cooking up other technological advances to make our lives easier. There are seasonless fabrics that are comfortable year-round. Designer Ralph Rucci has used them for his couture collections and even introduced rainwear made from transparent silk.

Better yet, a T-shirt manufacturer is using a technology called SPT, or sensory perception technologies, for a white cotton T-shirt that can moisturize and treat the skin with substances like fragrances and deodorants. According to Women's Wear Daily, some scientists even predict clothing that changes color while you wear it.

I have a few ideas I think scientists should explore:

Clothes that expand an inch or two after a meal, then return to normal size. (Spandex and elastic don't count.)

Shoe heels that automatically repair themselves.

Suede that never gets dirty.

Clothes that alert you when you don't match or look like you just woke up from a nightmare.

Pants that hem themselves.

Shirts that will never get those nasty yellow stains under arms.

Until then, I'll settle for more fashions that are wrinkle-free.