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B.J. Sigismund for Newsweek

Socialite Paris Hilton models an Alvin Valley gown the designer calls 'Oscar-appropriate.' (Her hair, make-up and attitude, however, may need an adjustment before tomorrow night)

## Back to Black

**Designers spent months promoting flashy gowns, shoes and bags to the stars for Oscar night. But when war broke out Wednesday, Hollywood rethought its wardrobe**

**By B. J. Sigismund**  
 NEWSWEEK WEB EXCLUSIVE

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March 22 — Sharon Stone had something very specific in mind. The actress was consulting with fashion designer Alvin Valley on Thursday about an Oscar-related event she would attend that night at Sotheby's in Los Angeles. War had begun in Baghdad and the tone in town was shifting very quickly. "Sharon said, 'I need something for a cocktail party and I need it to be black'," recalls Valley. "She said, 'Alvin, I need to look like people are *dying*'."

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Sharon Stone opted for pants just like these for her Oscar-related function on Thursday night



B.J. Sigismund for Newsweek

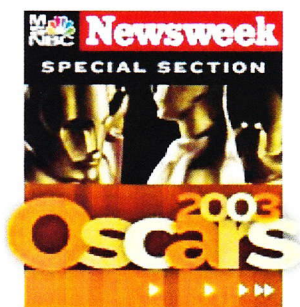
It's not exactly the type of talk you associate with the Academy Awards. But for Valley and the myriad other dress, shoe, jewelry and handbag designers outfitting Hollywood's A-listers during Oscar week—and don't forget the hair and make-up experts—the outbreak of war has added a whole new level of stress and uncertainty to

what's already one of their busiest times of year. "After the bombing started, people I'd already outfitted for different events were coming back and asking instead for suits and pants," says Valley. "People want to get it right." Stone, for instance, ended up in a pair of Valley's black pants for her Thursday night function. "And she looked fabulous," the designer says.

This year's dresses--like those of designer Alvin Valley--will be more business casual than brazen and crazy



See, it's a tricky thing, hitting the appropriate note fashion-wise, and looking phenomenal at the same time. So stylists have been doing a lot of last-minute scrambling. According to one Hollywood designer who preferred not to be named, "Chicago" nominee Queen Latifah had been planning to wear "big color" to Sunday's Oscars, but as of Friday afternoon, had opted instead for basic black. Actress Geena Davis, who's known for her fashion risk-taking, had selected something in "peachy pink," according to the designer, but has now switched to navy. She says the female hosts of "Access Hollywood," "Extra" and "Entertainment Tonight" had all chosen colorful outfits, but have now gone—you guessed it—back to black.



"Everyone was getting kinda down," says designer Mary Norton, whose brightly colored Moo Roo handbags have become a red carpet staple at various events over the last year. (Her clients include Stone, Camryn Manheim and Halle Berry.) "But we need to remember the focus. Although Hollywood's very important to my career, there are bigger issues going on here." Still, she's had plenty of bags returned. Norton's hoping some of her quieter offerings—purses in subdued silver and blue—show up on Oscar night. She believes Denzel Washington's wife, Pauletta Pearson, will be carrying a black Moo Roo bag with crystal rhinestones.

"Show business has been taken out of the Oscars this year," says shoe designer Stuart Weitzman. The signature colors of his shoes—fuchsia, turquoise, plum and aqua—won't be much on display this weekend. "The shoes need to be a reflection of the dresses," he says. Last year, the designer famously outfitted "Mulholland Drive" actress Laura Elena Harring with a pair of heels covered in \$1 million worth of diamonds, and he'd planned a similar gambit this year: a shoe encrusted with \$1.2 million in rubies. But Weitzman withdrew the shoes because of the event's new somber tone. He does have a little good news to report: "There isn't movement away from the sexy, sensual shoe," he says. "That's ingrained in these ladies. The heel's staying just as high."

And what about the hair? "Oscar night this year, you do *NOT* want to go with an extremely sexy look," says celebrity hairdresser Ricardo Rojas, who will be



doing the Oscar-night do's of Angela Bassett and bicoastal bad girls Paris and Nicky Hilton, the hotel heiresses. "The shape is really important," says Rojas, standing in the makeshift salon he's set up in his L.A. hotel suite. "The hair should be simple and elegant. The most difficult part will be getting it the *right* kind of simple."

"I want Ricardo to come live with me," interjects Paris Hilton, who was sitting nearby and whose locks were being licked into a very un-simple storm for Jade Jagger's party on Friday night. "I want him to do my hair every day." Well, at least until the war is over .

#### Oscars 2003

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