

Black

Black is the color for the Tallinn city dweller. Everywhere you look people are wearing black. Black shoes, stockings, pants, skirts, suits, dresses, coats, purses, book bags, briefcases....black is everywhere. If you look carefully, you can see other colors. Old grandmothers teetering on worn out red pumps, some university students in brown boots and jeans, and an occasional person in reeboks or new balance walking shoes (like me). It is intimidating!

Think about people you see everyday in Bemidji. What are they wearing? I guess a visitor from Tallinn would write to their paper that denim and khaki is the dress of the Bemidji citizen. But how many black shoes do you see? Well, maybe now that winter is coming you will see more, but most people are in comfortable shoes of different colors and many are in sports shoes.

In Tallinn, sports shoes are rare. Women are walking everywhere in high black heels and boots. Their feet must be killing them at the end of the day. They are beautiful and stylish and perhaps that is their primary goal as a city dweller. Brown shoes are very rare. Poor old ladies wear brown heels. I love sandals but rarely see any. No clogs, my favorite work shoes. What does it say about a culture that misses out on all of these comfortable shoes?

Well, after living here a month, I decided I needed some new shoes so I went to Stockmann's to look around. Stockmann's is an upscale Finnish Department Store with a huge perfume section and a complete grocery on the first floor with Porsche-like grocery carts. I found four other floors of beautiful things and one of them had women's shoes. Guess what color 99% of them were? From every shelf different styles of black shoes stared at me. I wanted a black pair, so this was very harmonious. And it suggested a reason for seeing only black in the city. Oh there were some very expensive American shoes on one shelf that were different colors, red and black, for instance. Most of the black ones were Finnish, Estonian, or Italian. I looked very hard at everything they had and just couldn't see me walking all around the city in any of it. And now fall and winter are coming with wet and slushy and icy conditions and none of them made provisions for this. Even the boots were smooth soled. You have to admire people who can walk about in winter in smooth soled boots.

I was real happy I brought my Rockports for winter. But I can't wear them to the Embassy for my lecture or to the Christmas party. I have three very stylish black outfits for fancy parties. Isn't that good planning? Before going to Estonia, I was told you needed to have nice dresses for Embassy parties and big Christmas and New Year's parties. I didn't have any nice outfits so I went out and bought three and they all happened to be black. I brought an older pair of black heels with me that were perfectly good for wearing an hour of so before having to change into my sandals. I envisioned myself in my black dressy dress at an Embassy party, walking about in my heels for an

hour or so, then quickly returning home and relaxing. Quickly returning home. That is the tricky concept. It means walking a couple of kilometers to the nearest tram through the ice and snow.

So my goal is to find some stylish black shoes in order to blend in with all of the other beautiful people here. And they have to go with dressy black and gold dresses and school clothes and they have to have tread on the soles so I don't fall and kill myself. Is this too much to ask? Somewhere in Tallinn there is a shoe store with exactly what I am looking for and it has to be black.