

# Recessionista SHOPPING

How to find great deals on designer clothing at secondhand stores

Your taste is Chanel, but your bank account is Banana Republic. The solution: secondhand shops. If you haven't checked out some of the nicer ones, you'll be in for a surprise. The merchandise is in good condition, and you can't beat the prices on one-of-a-kind items that can help you freshen up your wardrobe. Our reporter for this story, who is also a fashion stylist, came back from a trip to several secondhand shops on the East and West Coasts with armfuls of designer goodies in like-new condition. Check out a few of our favorites on page 30 along with expert tips on how you can dig up great finds.

But the competition is definitely heating up for the best picks as more fashionistas are becoming recessionistas and shopping at secondhand stores. Goodwill and the Salvation Army are reporting that sales are up as

much as 10 to 20 percent this year.

So how do you find the best stuff? First, here's a lesson on the three main types of stores that sell not-new clothes and accessories. "Vintage" shops generally sell top-quality "pre-worn" clothing, as well as some items that have never been worn. Paula Cooperman of Mill Crest Vintage in Lambertville, N.J., says she pays \$25 to have each pair of shoes professionally reconditioned before they go on the sales floor.

Julia Roberts made headlines when she wore vintage Valentino to the Oscars one year. With so many celebs in residence, Los Angeles is famous for its chi-chi secondhand shops. (If you're in town, check out Decades and Lily et Cie.)

At "consignment" and "resale" stores, people can sell clothing for cash. The best ones require clothes to be in mint condition and dry-cleaned before they'll accept them for sale. Prices, which tend to drop every 30 days the items stay on the racks, are 50 to 90 percent off retail, according to Carolyn Schneider, author of "The Ultimate Consignment and Thrift Store Guide" (CATS Publishing & Media, 2004).

Thrift shops like Salvation Army and Goodwill stores accept donations. The biggest bargains are there, but so too are the items with holes and stains. However, by shopping at those places you support disaster relief, job training and placement for needy and disabled people, and other good works.

Ready to go recessionista shopping? Here are four tips for finding the best secondhand shops.

■ **Look up shops in fancy ZIP codes.** The tonier the neighborhood, the better the booty.



ILLUSTRATIONS: ADRIAN VALENCIA

■ **Surf the Web.** You can search for local stores and visit great online shops like ShopGoodwill.com, ShopHousingWorks.com, and SomeLikeItVintage.com, which all benefit charities and carry fabulous clothing and accessories. DesignerApparel.com is another great find. Also go to [www.narts.org](http://www.narts.org), the site of the National Association of Resale and Thrift Shops, to find stores in your area.

■ **Scan eBay.** Just be sure to check seller-feedback scores, which should be at least 99 percent positive, and read the fine print to find out about an item's condition and shipping and return policies. Don't be shy about contacting the seller for more info. We found great retro-style cocktail dresses starting at just \$15, designer handbags for \$10 and up, and gently worn suits.

■ **Support a cause.** Karen Kleber, a New York City fashion stylist who swears by secondhand shopping, says, "Every disease has its charity." So select the cause nearest and dearest to your heart, then support it by shopping at its thrift store. She also recommends calling local hospitals to ask about their thrift stores.

## Smart shopping tips

**1 Check by phone.** Caren Kreider, owner of Philadelphia's Immortal Uncommon Resale, says smart customers call her periodically to see whether new goods have arrived. If you make friends with the owners, you can get them to call you. Kreider keeps track of shoppers' styles and sizes and calls when things come in.

**2 Shop for evening gowns and cashmere.** Wear-once-and-never-be-seen-in-again items like gowns are likely to be fantastic deals. Older cashmere sweaters tend to be thicker and better quality than new ones.

**3 Ask when new shipments are available.** Stylist Kleber says many thrift stores put out new shipments on Saturday

mornings to lure weekend shoppers. The end of the year is also a good time, when people clean out closets and donate clothes to get a tax break. If you live in a city where designers and manufacturers have showrooms and donate unsold items and samples to thrift shops, style consultant Nancy Hessel Weber says to shop in March and April for spring lines and in October and November for fall lines.

**4 If you're in Florida, shop for winter clothes.** "People move down there and discover they don't really need that overcoat," Kleber says.

**5 Bargain, bargain, bargain (but not at charity shops).** Prices are often negotiable.



## WHAT TO FIX, WHAT TO FORGET

Jean Kormos of Ghost Tailor, a high-end service in New York that specializes in vintage and secondhand clothing, tells you what to grab and what to leave on the rack.

**FIX IT** if it's too big.

**FORGET IT** if it's too small.

**FIX IT** if it's too long.

**FORGET IT** if it's too short.

Even if there's enough fabric to lengthen a hem, be careful: If the fabric is worn at the hemline, there will be a telltale line if the item is lengthened.

**FIX IT** if it's too long-waisted.

**FORGET IT** if it's too short-waisted.

**FIX IT** if the jacket sleeves are too long.

**FORGET IT** if the sleeves have buttons or cuffs that will make a standard hemming job difficult. (You can almost never shorten sleeves at the shoulder.)

### A few other tailoring tips to keep in mind:

■ It's possible to narrow the shoulders of a tailored jacket, but it's complicated and expensive.

■ A lot can be done to sweaters. Cover worn elbows with suede or leather patches for a relaxed look.

■ Sometimes things that are too big, like a man's jacket, can be charming. Try pushing up the sleeves or adding a belt. But if you're swimming in it, forget it.

■ When in doubt, ask if you can buy on spec, so you can take the item to a tailor to see if it can be fixed and for how much.

## Look what we found!

### CLASSICS

You can never go wrong searching for items that will always look good. Try to find tailored jackets and blazers, black wool pants, simple little black dresses, and cashmere cardigans. The outfit here is a beautifully tailored navy-and-white pinstriped jacket and matching trousers by Ralph Lauren. The jacket can go over jeans, the trousers can be paired with a white blouse, and together they're the perfect polished suit. They sold, after a little bargaining, for \$220 at Immortal Uncommon Resale in Philadelphia.



### TRENDY

Never spend big bucks on fads. But secondhand shopping is a good way to enjoy the latest trends. This skirt, with its border of jet-black beading, is at the height of today's fashion. The skirt has a lot to offer: flirty styling, timeless basic black, and a Prada label. It can anchor evening outfits for years to come. The skirt sold for \$75 at Immortal Uncommon Resale. Other trendy styles to be on the lookout for are anything with an animal print or in a metallic fabric, whether it's a handbag or a blouse.



### RETRO

Some elements of retro fashion come and go. Last year it was the shirtwaist dress. This year look for two trends that turn up regularly in vintage shops: lace and sheer fabrics. This sheer blouse from the 1940s was made to be worn under a suit jacket. Today it can go under a cardigan or over a camisole. It sold for \$58 at Mill Crest Vintage in Lambertville, N.J.



### JEWELRY

This bold wood necklace with etched "gold" leaves could have come down the runways in Europe. It sold for \$8.95 at Beacon's Closet in Brooklyn, N.Y.



## Clean out your closet and cash in

If you have designer items in good condition, dry-clean them and take them to a consignment shop. (If your clothing doesn't have a designer label, donate it to a charity and get a tax break.) Often you'll get 50 percent of the price the item sells for. But prices drop over time. The longer your consignment takes to sell, the less you'll earn. If your clothing qualifies as vintage—that can vary from store to store—many shop owners will buy it outright at an agreed-upon price.

