

FASHION

WORN AGAIN: THE JOY OF PRE-OWNED DESIGNER CLOTHES

Can you gift someone a second-hand suit without them feeling at least a little squeamish about who wore it previously? One writer tries to find out

Karen Toulon

My love for pre-owned fashion goes back decades. Apparently, in picking through musty piles in search of dresses spun from angel wings, I have been doing my part to save the planet.

America’s second-hand apparel market is expected to grow to US\$32 billion this year, according to an industry report. That’s up from US\$28 billion last year.

In recent months, internet consignment sites have been touting how much they are unlike traditional retailers by highlighting the amount of waste they save by recycling clothing. At the same time, the companies stress how much they are exactly like traditional retailers when it comes to basic shopping practises. Need something for yourself? Visit a second-hand store. Need a gift? Check out a consignment site. Not sure what to buy that special someone? No worries – they have gift cards!

Some websites, like industry leader ThredUP, focus on brands that shoppers can find in shopping centres. Others, like The RealReal and Poshmark, offer high-end designer labels and vintage pieces, which usually means they’re at least 20 years old.

This past Christmas season, I got to thinking – could I actually do some of my Christmas shopping on a resale site, like I might do in a shopping centre? And if I were to buy for other people, would it matter to them that the clothing had been worn by others?

It’s not a huge, huge concern – but it’s not nothing either. Where do these clothes come from? It’s not like that’s on the label. Is it as simple as “in with the new and out with the old”? Perhaps weight gain or loss? Migrating fashion tastes? Did the former owners move on to the great consignment shop in the sky?

I needed a test subject to shop for. Someone who appreciated well-made clothes; who might or might not feel squeamish about donning a shirt someone else had sweated into. Or worse.

That would be my husband. Clothing is somehow different from purses and jewellery. It’s more intimate and grows older less gracefully. Unless they are deeply soiled or badly damaged, well-made leather and precious



Quality leather goods such as this Chanel bag improve over time.

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metal goods can actually improve over time.

My reasons for loving “pre-loved” are personal. I like items that have some history. I also appreciate the possibility that, by going pre-worn, I won’t run into my sartorial doppelgänger – which is an issue as global brands and retail chains proliferate.

I conquered any hesitancy about wearing pre-owned clothing years ago. My most memorable purchase was a tan suede frock coat with decorative embroidery, trimmed with long Mongolian lamb fur along the cuffs, front opening and bottom hem. I found it in France while on a university semester abroad. I never ran into anyone dressed remotely like me.

I have gifted my daughters resale-site vintage purses and skinny gold necklaces with teeny gemstones that were pretty and unique. But I had never got anything second-hand for my husband.

I decided on a suit. I know my husband’s measurements. I searched by those specifics, by price – under US\$400 – and landed on some Paul Smith options. With an offer for 20 per cent off, I selected a blue wool-and-mohair suit for US\$225, or US\$180 after the discount. Condition: very good. I checked the Paul Smith

site. New Paul Smith suits clocked in at US\$1,560 for starters. So far, so good.

The RealReal tells me the suit saved 241 litres of water and 70km.

I added a Hermes Silk Abstract print tie with an estimated retail value of US\$195. It was listed at US\$75 but cost US\$60 after the 20 per cent off. Its condition was described as pristine, with no obvious signs of wear.

Within a week, my packages arrived. The suit’s shipping literature included a Christian Dior quote: “Don’t buy much, but be sure what you buy is good.” The tie seemed to have other ideas: “Anything worth doing is worth overdoing.” Attributed to Mick Jagger.

Both items were as advertised, in look and feel. The suit was handsome. The jacket could be worn right out of the box; the trousers needed a pressing. The tie was flawless.

On Christmas Day, my husband Eric admired my wrapping and started The Opening.

The suit was first. He slipped on the jacket. It was a hit. Perhaps Eric was won over because it fitted like a glove. Perhaps you cannot argue with excellent tailoring.

“Does it concern you that the jacket, and more specifically, the trousers, belonged to someone else?” Nothing quite says “Merry Christmas” like interrogating your husband.

“Not at all,” Eric said. He is not a clothes junkie, but as a trained painter, he does respect proportion, craft and colour.

“Do you think you are less concerned because you assume a certain social class of the former owner?” I ask.

Lovely sentiment to insert into the middle of this season of selfless giving. I think the crackling fire actually paused for a moment as it, too, digested the question. These sites do present upscale items with upscale service. This is as far from rooting around in a second-hand bin as you can get.

“Absolutely not,” he said.

Modelling his new clothing, he worked in some poses. He did a passable approximation of a mannequin, arms awkwardly akimbo. And, inexplicably, he executed a goofy forward lunge, like a mannequin suddenly embroiled in a sword fight.

The trousers are a bit snug. Luckily, we have an excellent tailor one town over. For US\$45, he will work his magic. Sadly, I am on my own when it comes to the forward lunge. Bloomberg



THE NAKED TRUTH
LUIISA TAM



Illustration: Marcelo Duhaide

Resolutions to help reboot your relationship

Life coach Sonia Samtani says start the year on the right foot by paying close attention to your emotional as well as sexual needs

Never underestimate the power of subtle changes you can make in a romantic relationship to increase intimacy. Sometimes, even a small positive gesture can enhance a relationship because a thoughtful intention not only makes your partner feel loved, but also helps nurture and strengthen your connection.

No matter how long you and your partner have been together, it’s always a good idea to try to create effective and lasting resolutions to enhance your relationship.

And what better time to do it than now, at the start of a new year? Remember, sometimes it’s not about what the year can bring you but what you can bring to the new year. First and foremost, be positive and proactive if you want something nice to happen to your relationship.

Before setting out to plan and achieve your resolutions for your relationship, observe some useful ground rules so as to prioritise what to focus on and what to avoid.

First, you must remember to keep your resolutions simple and achievable, says Sonia Samtani, a clinical hypnotherapist and a relationship and wellness coach.

“Sometimes couples get too ambitious and set too many goals that don’t set the stage to win. To begin with, set aside some quality time with your partner because you don’t want to have this conversation in a rush.”

She says it is important to know what you want to get from creating your resolutions and how you want them to affect your relationship.

Samtani also recommends making some ground rules. “Only talk about the past from the perspective of what was positive or what you can learn. Talk about how something made you feel as a means of sharing and [do] not use this as an opportunity to criticise or blame the other; focus on what you want rather than what you don’t want, and make

HOW TO ENHANCE YOUR ROMANTIC CONNECTION

- Be honest with yourself and each other
- Be aligned in your intentions and set tangible, measurable goals for both emotional and sexual intimacy. This could be about how regularly you communicate, date nights
- Set time for sharing your feelings, and separate time for sexual intimacy; knowing when to talk is as important as the conversation
- Communicate regularly about what’s working and what’s not, both in and out of the bedroom

“Only talk about the past from the perspective of what was positive or what you can learn

SONIA SAMTANI, RELATIONSHIP AND WELLNESS COACH

it plausible so you can both visualise what it looks like to achieve it.”

To identify what to focus on, be aware about what worked and what didn’t work in the past, she says.

“Ask yourself, what was our most romantic/intimate/ sexual moment with each other in 2019, and what made it so special? Allow that to help you commit to what you will make an effort to do more of. Let each other think of one thing that did not

work in the relationship in 2019, what they have learned from it, and what solution they would like to propose,” she adds.

For this to work, you have to make sure you are not just stating issues but providing possible resolutions, too.

When it comes to enhancing closeness and connection in a relationship, Samtani suggests: “It’s good to give individual attention to both the emotional and sexual aspects. If you are in a monogamous relationship, acknowledge that you have sexual needs and you have chosen your partner as the space to get these needs met, so it’s important to maintain sexual attraction. Quite often, couples view their long-term partner as a cuddly roommate they can kiss on the forehead or as the mother or father of their child.”

And be mindful not to be judgmental or critical if you want to bring your partner on board to realise these resolutions together.

She suggests: “Make the conversation about ‘we’ instead of ‘me’ and create a context that is appealing for both of you.”

“Saying things like ‘Honey, I would love to have a conversation about how we can be even more loving, more intimate, and more sexual’ will definitely get you more of a buy-in than saying ‘We didn’t have enough sex last year’ or ‘you never listen!’” And there are many ways to boost our own romantic and sexual being and quality, Samtani adds.

To boost your own romantic quality means looking at what has worked for you in the past and recreating the sensory experience of it such as thinking of a time when you felt more romantic and sexual. Then ask yourself: “What was my mindset like at the time? How did I feel about myself and my partner? What was the quality of my thoughts?” she says.

Ultimately, you will realise that it’s more about the way you thought and felt than what you did, she says. All you need to do is generate the same thoughts and feelings and allow that to inspire your actions.

Luisa Tam is a correspondent at the Post



Sites like the Vestiaire Collective present upscale items with upscale service. Photos: Handouts

ARTS

Indian festival diversifies to showcase nation’s culture

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The India by the Bay festival returns next month for its sixth edition, featuring an array of talks and performances that showcase Indian culture.

Highlights this year include a concert by sitar player Shubhendra Rao, a disciple of 20th-century sitar maestro Ravi Shankar; a unique rendition of *King Lear* by actor Vinay Pathak; and a performance of Odissi, an ancient classical dance form.

The week-long event will debut a “Literary Saturday” and “Holistic Sunday”, two additions that organisers hope will help the festival evolve by offering a broader view of Indian culture.

India by the Bay is co-present-

ed by the Asia Society Hong Kong and Teamwork Arts, organisers of the Jaipur Literary Festival, and supported by the Indian consulate in the city.

Teamwork Arts’ managing director, Sanjoy Roy, and director of Hong Kong festivals Lakshmi Laroia said their focus was on diversification.

“India by the Bay is a lens through which the diversity and complex narrative of Indian culture can be shared,” they said in a joint statement.

“India is a country where every 100 miles everything changes – our dialect, food tastes, way of dressing, traditions, and so on. The syncretic nature of India is what makes it so culturally rich and relevant.”

Literary Saturday will feature talks and discussions involving

speakers including Mahatma Gandhi’s granddaughter, activist Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee, and Lisa Ray, one of India’s first supermodels, who became an actress and is a cancer survivor and social activist.

Bhattacharjee will speak about her grandfather’s vision and legacy, with an emphasis on its current relevance, while Ray will delve into her fascinating life story – which she set out in her book *Close to the Bone*.

Holistic Sunday features meditation and yoga sessions with yoga scholar Daniel Simpson, in addition to talks about mindfulness and Ayurvedic medicine.

Sanjay Garg of Raw Mango – an Indian fashion brand that champions indigenous textiles – will stage a fashion show at a gala dinner hosted by celebrity chef

Rahul Gomes Pereira, aka Picu. The head chef at Jamun restaurant in New Delhi will serve up a variety of dishes from across the country.

Roy reflected on the growth of the festival and its cultural significance. “India by the Bay has come a long way in the past six years... The festival has brought India’s personality to life with vigour in the heart of Hong Kong,” he said.

“The world needs more dialogue. The arts create platforms which know no boundaries nor borders. Festivals such as India by the Bay create empathy and build strong emotional ties, as these are founded on the strength of art, literature, wellness and food.”

India by the Bay, Feb 14 to 19, to be held at various locations. indiabytheybay.com



The Srjan ensemble will perform Indian classical (Odissi) dances at the festival. Photo: Handout