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well styled you

by Amanda Greene

stylish for pennies

(or pretty darn close)

To get the best clothing deals, shop consignment: You'll find name brands and designer labels at a fraction of the retail price

Consignment store shopping is having a heyday. According to NARTS: The Association of Resale Professionals, in the past year both new stock and new customers have increased dramatically. In this economy, that's no surprise: "You can spend up to 95 percent below retail prices," says Ann Siner, owner of Eco Chic Consignments in Phoenix. Read on for the ins and outs of how to buy and sell.



Associate Fashion Editor Amanda Greene on the hunt for great finds

what is consignment shopping?

You know those khakis that your son wore once and then outgrew? Or that dress hanging in your closet that you just don't love? Consignment stores will buy them from you to sell to their customers at a deep discount. They'll typically price your item at one-third of the retail value; once it sells, they'll pay you 35 to 50 percent of that price (or a little more in store credit). So, if you bring in a \$90 dress, they'll tag it at \$30, and you'll take home around \$15 after someone buys it. Resale or buy-sell-trade stores will give you cash or store credit upfront and will often take lower-priced clothing—but as with consignment, clothing must be in pristine condition. If your item doesn't sell in 90 days, you can pick it up, or some stores will donate it to charity. *(Please turn to 52)*

CONSIGNMENT STORE CHAINS

● **Buffalo Exchange** Buy-sell-trade stores that specialize in trendy clothes and closet staples. (buffaloexchange.com)

● **Plato's Closet** Geared to teenagers, they buy, sell and trade brands like Gap and Express. (platoscloset.com)

● **Second Time Around** Stocked with everything from basics to designer items, these stores are impeccably organized. (secondtimearound.net)

● **Once Upon A Child** Babies' and children's clothing in sizes from newborn to youth 16. (onceuponachild.com)

For more of the best consignment stores around the country, go to womansday.com/consignment

how to find great clothes

scout neighborhoods "Each of our 23 stores has a unique personality," says Jeanne Nicholson, director of marketing for Second Time Around, since each store's inventory comes from the surrounding community. If you're after higher-end, classic pieces, head to a fancy neighborhood. If you're looking for funkier, more trendy items, check out a college area.

buy brands you know and like That way you'll buy pieces that work with what you have and will fit as you expect them to. But always try on: The previous owner may have had alterations done, which could turn what appears to be a size 12 dress into a size 10.

know when to shop Mondays are good, because people clean out their closets over the weekend. And shop often: Most stores roll out new

merchandise constantly. Eco Chic Consignments stocks 500 new items at each of their four women's locations every day.

if you love it, buy it Chances are, there's only one. "I've had people come in, fall in love with something and walk away," says Deb Malkin, owner of Re/Dress NYC, a resale clothing store for sizes 14 and up. "They'll come back, sometimes on the same day, but it'll be gone." If you're on the fence because you found a piece that's almost perfect, don't be afraid to take it to a tailor for alterations. It's an easy way to turn a good find into a great one.

inspect carefully Consignment stores make every effort to buy clothes in mint condition, but people do make mistakes. "Look for hallmarks of quality, such as weight: Well-made leather belts and

handbags are heavier," advises Kerstin Block, co-owner of Buffalo Exchange. Shoes, on the other hand, tend to show their age. Before buying, check for overly scuffed bottoms and try them on to be sure that they still feel supportive. Fabric like cotton and jersey tends to wear thin. Hold the item up to the light to inspect for worn patches or holes. Check unexpected areas for pilling, like the hips (where purses rub).

it doesn't hurt to bargain "Prices are negotiable to a certain extent," says Sophie Newman, a manager at Second Time Around in New York City. While stores will rarely lower the price on a new arrival, pieces that have been in the store for a while, or have damage from shelf life, like sagging or hanger marks, may be fair game for a markdown. *(Please turn to 54)*

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HOW TO SELL YOUR STUFF

Some items sell better than others—in general, there's a need for larger sizes, as well as trendy and stylish pieces.

● **prep your clothes** "The better condition your clothing's in, the better chance you have of selling it," advises Newman. It's wise to freshen up the pieces: Have them dry-cleaned, iron out wrinkles, replace missing buttons.

● **sell in season** Go at the very beginning of the season, or

just before. Right now stores are buying for summer.

● **know the store's policies** Do they buy clothing by appointment only or do they accept drop-ins? What's their return policy? Some stores don't accept returns; others offer store credit only. Should you bring clothes on hangers or folded?

● **be selective** If it's your first visit to a store, "bring in a cross-section of your

closet so that you can get a sense of what types of items they'll buy," says Malkin. While the staff sorts through your items, ask them questions to learn more about what they're looking for. Afterward, browse the floor to check out what kind of clothes they stock. Not every consignment store sells children's clothing, for example.

● **don't sell designer knockoffs** (logo bags, etc.). It's illegal!