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Secondhand style: Tips for navigating resale stores

TODAY's Bobbie Thomas offers tips for you to experience 'fashion fate'

Resale stores are often viewed as intimidating mazes of merchandise that lack the luster of big, bright department stores. But these places can be home to many of your future favorite finds.

Call me kooky, but there is a magical feeling that comes over me every time I experience “fashion fate” — when that one perfect piece happens to be in the right size, at the right place, the moment I walk in.

With a few tips and tricks you can navigate these underutilized shops like a pro, ending up with truly unique pieces — often for just pennies!

The four B's of thrifting: Bags, belts, boots and blazers

For those who describe the idea of shopping at vintage or resale shops as “overwhelming,” try starting small with accessories and outerwear.

Purses are particularly great for those who are testing the waters in the secondhand world, as they are easy to clean up and can seamlessly blend into a modern wardrobe.

Belts are another ideal item. They are one of the most inexpensive ways to maximize your wardrobe. Leather belts tends to look better with age, while retro styles offer unique buckles, shapes and colors.

Boots are another favorite find at secondhand stores. From classic cowboy kicks to refined riding boots, you can snag the creme de la creme of different decades, all beautifully broken-in and weathered, without paying a premium.

And at bargain prices, don't dismiss the idea of DIY. A small rip or stain can be a creative opportunity rather than reason for discouragement. An old brooch and a little TLC can quickly elevate an accessory from a frumpy castaway to a new favorite statement-maker.

Lastly, don't overlook [outerwear](#) when thrifting. You'll often find the most personality and punch in items like blazers. The best part? You don't have to examine everything in the store to find what you want. Instead, walk the aisles and scan the racks to look for prints, embellishments and stitching that jump out at you.

Remember, vintage typically runs small, so don't be afraid to try on anything and everything that catches your attention.

Editing pros

If you still aren't ready to dive headfirst into the sea of resale, look to the Web for some help when it comes to [purchasing](#) pre-owned pieces.

An added bonus to browsing boutiques online is that the clothes are often shown styled and on body forms rather than simply draped on hangers.

Etsy is the go-to marketplace for all things handmade — you'll also find more than [900,000 vintage items](#) currently for sale. Creative Etsy users like "[Vintage Shaun](#)" and "[Salvage Life](#)" have already sifted through stacks of garments. Put them to the test and pluck out their best items.

Explore stores everywhere

Last but not least, explore resale shops everywhere you visit, if time allows.

Use sites like [The Thrift Shopper](#) and [Resale Shopping](#) to find a thrift store near you.

Search for winter-weather items in warm climates and vice versa, since lack of demand usually means better deals.

And thanks to the digital world we live in, you can explore local styles from the comfort of your own couch.

[My Sister's Closet](#) is an Arizona favorite with more than 10 retail locations. It's the largest designer consignment store in the country, with items usually priced between 60 to 95 percent below retail.

And [C. Madeleine's](#), based in Miami, is a celebrity [stylist](#) favorite that also allows you to browse photos of items available in their 10,000-square-foot showroom without having to travel thousands of miles. (Although the beaches make it worth the trip!)

From NYC's [What Goes Around Comes Around](#) to L.A.'s [Decades](#) and everything in between, you can find many more consignment stores and curators online.

No matter how you decide to hunt, always keep in mind that the art of thrifting, like anything else, takes a bit of patience and practice. But once you know how and where to look, you'll have a one-of-a-kind wardrobe in no time.