

Tightening somebody else's belt

Many are looking to cut costs these days, but do wardrobes have to suffer? In fact, belt-tightening can be fun – especially when it's somebody else's. *Swiss News* goes shopping.

By Susan Vogel-Misicka | While scanning the accessory department of the Bern basement shop, a flash of purple suede catches my eye. The detail is stunning – shades of eggplant and orchid woven into a checkerboard pattern. Upon closer inspection, I discover it's a Yves Saint Laurent belt – and it looks almost new! It's two sizes too big, but I try it on anyway and consult a mirror. It would work if I had it altered, but that would cost me. Explaining my problem to the shopkeeper, I haggle sweetly for a discount – and get it.

Welcome to the world of second-hand shopping – a world that's growing steadily in Switzerland. Over the

years, consignment shops have been popping up in cities and towns around the nation. Some of the fanciest resemble designer boutiques, while others have more of a bargain-basement feel. All offer an unpredictable array of one-off clothing, shoes and accessories.

High-end second-hand

In Zurich's Seefeld neighbourhood, Finesse sells designer women's fashions only. As owner Draga Kurz explains, her customers wouldn't be interested in second-hand department store clothing that they could easily afford to buy new. Opened in 2004, Kurz's corner boutique has a particularly good selection of handbags and shoes.

"Even people with a lot of money shop here," says Kurz. And you do need a decent stash of cash to afford the merchandise

at Finesse. For example, a Missoni twinset might go for SFr 180, a pair of Ferragamo loafers for SFr 90, and a vintage Gianni Versace skirt for SFr 65. Yet Finesse's prices are more reasonable than some of the others in the area; at Jasmine Second-Hand down the road, SFr 200 seems to be the minimum required for most items.

Kurz splits the profits 50/50 with her suppliers; she has a core group of about 50 women who regularly deliver items that they no longer need or want.

"The sellers often buy something here with the money they've just earned," says Kurz with a smile. The temptation is certainly understandable.

Something for everyone

While some consignment shops focus exclusively on high-end designer duds, others offer a wider spectrum.

"I sell everything from C&A to Versace, and that's reflected in the prices. I want that everybody can find something they can afford," says Diana Schläpfer, owner of Inkognito in Zug's old town. Indeed, many of her items are priced from SFr 30 to SFr 50.

Schläpfer says that her customers, women aged 15-70, come from all walks of life. What they have in common is an interest in fashion and a desire to find unusual items that aren't available in mainstream stores.

Kurz in Zurich agrees. "Sometimes, second-hand shops have better things. A regular store might





Left: Finesse in Zurich; Above: Jasmine Second-Hand in Zurich

only sell what's 'in' at the moment." In contrast, consignment shops tend to offer a good selection of timeless, classic designs as well as exotic items that may have been purchased abroad.

When Schläpfer opened Inkognito in 1994, many people were reluctant to buy used clothing. But today, second-hand bargain hunting is considered socially acceptable. Schläpfer estimates that about half of her own wardrobe is second-hand.

"Swiss women are more fashion-conscious these days, but not at all costs," says Schläpfer.

Budget bargains

Thrift shops run by charitable organisations usually have the lowest prices. The merchandise is donated and the proceeds go to charity. While these shops are a good source of affordable apparel for low-income families, well-heeled customers are also welcome.

"We have customers who could afford to shop in regular stores, but for many, thrift shopping is a hobby," says Berta Küng, who manages the Heilsarmee Secondhand in Lucerne.

In addition to women's clothes and accessories, her well-kept shop sells books and house wares. Küng says clothing sales make up about 70 per cent of her shop's turnover, with handbags being especially popular.

Labels like Armani, Prada and Wolford make occasional appearances, but tend to get snapped up quickly. Items are priced according to value and condition. A pair of gently worn Bally pumps might

go for SFr 54, while shoes from a less prestigious maker might carry a SFr 19 price tag. Slow-moving goods get marked down or swapped with sister shops.

Küng says sales are better this year than they were in 2008, but it's hard to say whether that's because of – or in spite of – the recession.

"There are also customers who think more carefully about whether they really need something or not," notes Küng.

In Zug, Schläpfer says that 2008 was one of her best years. She hasn't noticed a change in the number of customers shopping at Inkognito this year. According to Kurz at Finesse in Zurich, there are typically slow periods like late winter and mid-summer.

"But I don't think second-hand shops suffer on account of the economic crisis – on the contrary," says Kurz.

A buyer and seller's market

A great way to clear closet clutter and recoup some wardrobe money is to haul surplus clothing to a consignment shop. But be realistic when choosing candidates to sell: if you think it looks shabby, so will customers.

"Items need to be well cared for and in good condition," says Kurz. Call ahead to make an appointment to offer your wares, and don't feel bad if only half are accepted. Shop owners are always careful to select items with the best resale chances.

Katja Mosimann of Zurich has had

luck selling items at Finesse. "It never occurred to me before recently, but I think it's a good idea. It's worthwhile," she says, of her new sales experience.

As a buyer, check for stains and other visible flaws. It's also wise to see if it passes the smell test – a blazer could look perfect but harbour an unpleasant odour.

"Choose things that can be washed easily, because dry cleaning is quite expensive and ruins the nice bargain," advises shopper Iride-Sibylle Gleichauf of Lucerne.

She also shares the following tip: "Look for designers, because normally they are one or two years ahead of mainstream fashion, and they often use really nice materials like silk, cotton and cool wool."

Meanwhile, sometimes it's possible to snag brand-new items with the original tags attached. At Finesse, a local celebrity recently deposited four dozen pairs of shoes – many of which had never been worn. (New Manolos for SFr 350, anybody?)

Fashionable dissent

Despite some of the deals to be had, not everyone is a fan of the second-hand scene. Wäis Kiani, a fashion columnist at *annabelle* magazine, finds the prices at Swiss consignment shops way too high.

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“With clothing, the decrease in value is similar to that of cars. As I take an item out of the shop, the value drops 30 per cent. It goes down another 30 per cent with the first wearing, and yet another 30 per cent by the next season – that’s a depreciation of 90 per cent!”

Instead, Kiani stages her own annual second-hand event for *annabelle* readers. Up for grabs are her own barely-worn cast-offs as well as items from her sister and her mother.

With the exception of high-end handbags, everything goes for under SFr 100, with many bargains in the SFr 5 to SFr 20 range.

“I don’t want to make a killing – it should be fun. It detoxes my closet and makes room for new things, and especially important, others should enjoy the stuff I’ve schlepped home from all over the world,” says Kiani.

Bargains are in the eye of the beholder; only the customer can decide how much he or she is willing to shell out in the name of fashion.

When I return to the cobbler, there’s a surprise waiting for me along with my custom-sized belt. The re-sizing process was simpler than expected, so he charges me less than originally quoted. Which leaves me with a few more francs to play with! Indeed, tightening somebody else’s belt is fun.

Go shopping!

Top shops

The Fizzzen chain of stores carries vintage clothing, and has branches in five Swiss cities: Basel, Bern, Chur, Lucerne and Zurich (www.fizzzen.ch)

Basel

Kontrast
Rössligasse 18
4125 Riehen
061 641 20 75
www.luxury-second-hand.com

Bern

Secondo
Kramgasse 81
3011 Bern
031 311 40 17
www.secondo.ch

Geneva

Audace
4, rue des Barrières
1204 Genève
022 311 60 41

“La Boutique” Jonction
Bd Carl-Vogt 34
1205 Genève
022 328 22 04
www.csp.ch

Locarno

Remy’s
via Castelrotto 7
6600 Locarno
079 273 64 83

Lucerne

Heilsarmee Brocki
Habsburgerstrasse 40
6003 Lucerne
041 210 08 88
www.brocki.ch

PurPur

Haldenstrasse 5
6006 Lucerne
041 410 15 01

Zug

Inkognito
Ober Altstadt 28
6300 Zug
041 710 46 82

Zurich

Finesse
Höschgasse 81
8008 Zurich
043 499 87 07

Jasmine Second-Hand
Seefeldstrasse 47
8008 Zurich
044 251 96 74

On haggling

Because consignment shops agree on a price with their suppliers, the salesperson might be unable to offer any discounts. But it’s certainly worth asking.

Zurich’s Finesse owner Draga Kurz (right) chats with a customer



Inkognito in Zug invites you to accessorise

