

Making mistakes work

CHONG See Ming describes her style as eclectic. She loves vintage summer dresses, and says she sticks to one statement piece per outfit. So, she'd go with a vintage necklace she picked up from the flea market at Porte du Vanves, Paris which goes well with her plain T-shirts.

She also has a fondness for vintage Gloomesh bags, which she says goes with all her evening wear. And of course, she loves traditional clothes like kebayas, cheongsams and sarongs.

Why do you love it

It all started during my uni days. I used to haunt Salvation Army/St Vincent de Paul and other opportunity shops across Melbourne, Australia. It was simply great winter fashion for a penny-pinching student like me. I used to freak my mom out by telling her that some nice old ladies had died and left me their clothes.

Vintage fashion at that time also represented a piece of history I was curious about, being new to Australia and its culture. It is still fascinating to imagine the lady behind the dress/bag/necklace... and how it was like for women there not too long ago.

Janet (Lee) and I have frequented the flea market at Amcorp Mall since it started. We craved the heat in the car park in 1996-97 until the management moved the market indoors. We bought fantastic bags, shoes and necklaces, and had lengthy chats with the sellers about where they came from.

Tips

Don't be afraid of making mistakes. If the dress is too big, it can be altered or use a belt to cinch the waist. I once bought a pair of vintage nyonya shoes just for the beadwork and found a cobbler to re-make them in my size.

A dress three sizes too big but made of material too beautiful to resist can be repurposed into a billowy 50s skirt.

Don't be afraid of aged and worn marks on items. I always find it funny that some people shop

Chong See Ming in a vintage print dress and holding two of her best buys - a Charles Jourdan bag and a Chanel 2.55.



Chong picked up this bronze necklace at Porte du Vanves in Paris.

vintage but expect mint condition. Some things look better worn especially leather bags. Do research. Janet and I buy lots of books on vintage fashion. We read magazines like Vogue to keep up with current fashion trends and religiously follow websites like The Sartorialist, Facehunter, Klue, Tongue-in-cheer and Whatkiewore.com. Build good relationships with your favourite sellers. After awhile, they know what you like and will identify items that look good on you.

When you are overseas, look for winterwear. I bought some woolen turtle necks and cashmere cardigans for a song in charity shops in New Zealand and Australia. I also found a fabulous red Kenzo suede jacket for less than €50 (RM219) at the Porte Du Montreuil flea market in Paris.

Best buys

I suppose it would be things that I'd never dream of finding like a Kenzo satchel or a Charles Jourdan suede bucket bag, for RM5 each, or an almost-mint Chanel 2.55 from the 1980s for RM10 at a charity table, also at Amcorp Mall.

But I must say it's probably the intricately-woven, crochet raffia bag in an unusual deep metallic mauve. It's unmarked and unbranded, but so very pretty and you can feel the love in every thread.

Working the vintage style

Unique finds, great bargains and one-of-a-kind items are what you get when it comes to vintage fashion. But how do you know the real deal from the pretenders?

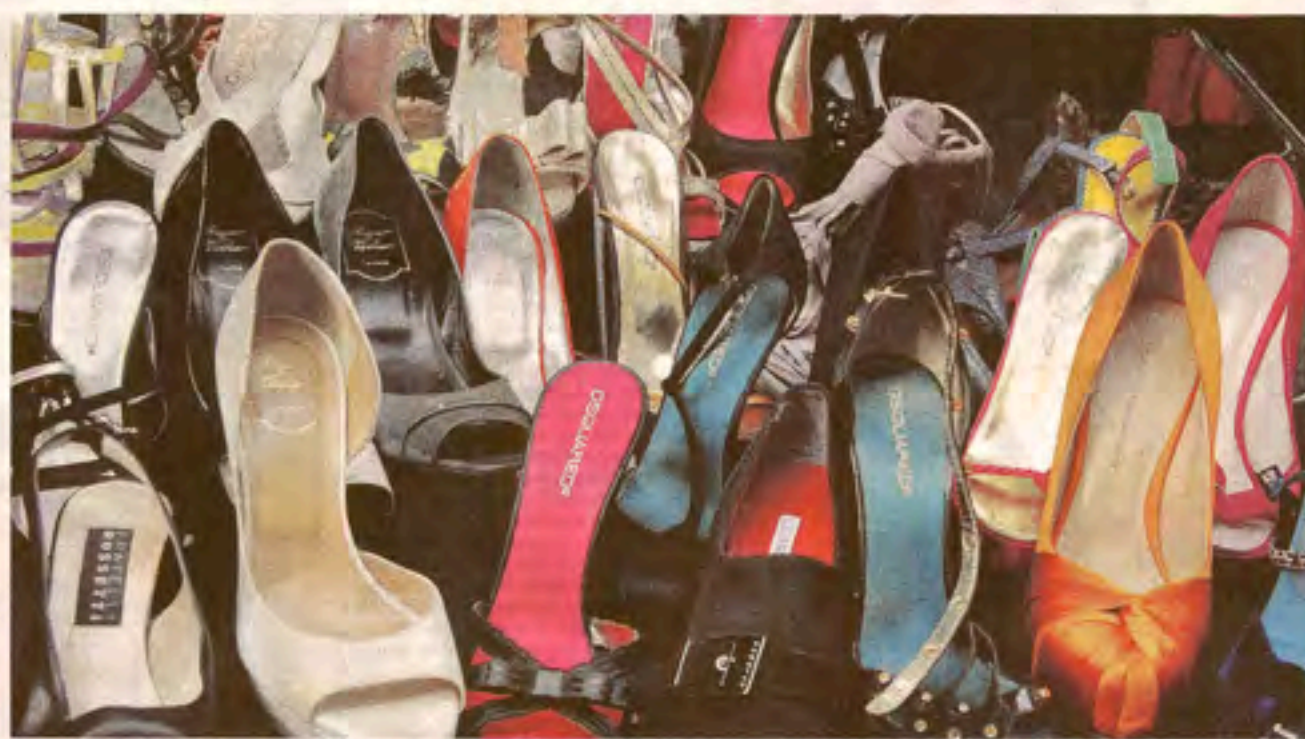
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THE problem in this era of fast fashion is that by the time you're wearing something, it's probably on its way out. That's why it's more practical if you don't follow trends slavishly; you'll get more mileage from your wardrobe.

Vintage fashion is a great way to create your own unique look, and ensuring no one else wears the same outfit as you.

It can also be very affordable and environmentally friendly, and you can pick up some fabulous pieces that can be great wardrobe investments. After all, vintage items have held up all these years, haven't they?

The first thing you need to do is understand what vintage means. The word "vintage" actually comes from wine, as in vintage wine; which means the older the wine is, the more valuable it is. Vintage fashion is like that too, except you don't always have to pay through your nose. You can get some really valuable items for a steal if you know where to look and how to bargain.



Flea markets are good hunting grounds for vintage shoes.

Vintage is defined as being 25 years old or more. True vintage clothing tends to be one-of-a-kind pieces and are rare. It can also be marked at premium prices. But if you have the patience, you can find some bargains at thrift stores or flea markets.

Due to the repetitive nature of fashion, we get designers reinventing and reinterpreting looks from certain eras decades later.

That's where you have to be

careful because a mini dress from the swinging 60s is very different from a mini dress created in the 90s interpreting the 60s. That's when it's not called vintage, but retro fashion.

To simplify, vintage is an item from an era, retro is the copy of an item from an era! Antiques, as you should know, applies to items at least 100 years and older.

Quality also comes into play, and generally clothes made years before mass production tend to be

better made.

Something else you will notice about vintage is that it will look aged. However pristine the condition is, there will be signs of it being old. And that's the beauty of vintage, the older it gets, the better or more valuable it is.

How about pricing? This depends on where you find it, whether you can bargain or if the person selling it has an idea of its actual value.

True collectors are primarily concerned with the item itself such as the era it's from, the style, quality and sometimes, the brand.

Wouldn't you love to find a haute couture piece from the 1940s? What a fabulous find that would be! And an extremely rare one, which makes vintage hunting all the more fun.

To get an idea at some great places to shop plus some vintage hunting tips, we spoke to four vintage fashion lovers.



Janet Lee holding one of her favourite dresses bought from the Salvation Army.

Old School Romantic

JANET Lee describes her look as "unapologetically creative, at times unapologetically old school." The singer favours classic silhouettes like those worn by Audrey Hepburn and Grace Kelly for official events. In her own time, she goes for the bohemian look.

Why do you love it?

I started buying second-hand about a decade ago with my best pal, See Ming at Amcorp Mall, Petaling Jaya. My affinity with vintage style is an inborn thing; it does feel like that to me. It's just like my love for music, it has just been in me for as long as I know.

In this age of mass-produced and cheap high-street fashion, vintage fashion wins hands down with its old school romantic detailing and quality. I think most fashion enthusiasts cannot resist that.

Why second-hand shopping? It's knowing what you buy is attached to someone's unique history, and that you'd most likely not see another girl wearing the same dress.

Tips

Give some thought to your personal style and experiment to find out what



One of Janet Lee's favourite vintage beaded evening bags picked up from Amcorp Mall.

looks great on you. When you know what suits your style and your body, it is easier to invest in vintage items.

My principle is that if the item exceeds my budget but I know that that piece of clothing or accessory will make me look great, and I will wear it again and again, I'll buy it.

I always advise people not to shy away from ill-fitting second-hand pieces. Just find a good tailor and make it work for you.

If an item is broken, but I am in love with its charm and beauty I'd buy it.

Best buys

Too many to name a best one. I found this black vintage sequin gown with a big mermaid-organza tail in a second-hand shop in Paris for only €60 (RM262). I got a vintage Bohemian-style belt at Amcorp Mall years ago for RM2. I also found Bruno Magli vintage handbag and Salvatore Ferragamo wallet, for RM8 each!



Kaelyn Choo loves the individuality vintage clothes/pieces can offer.

Eclectic mix

HAFIDZUDIN Zainal is small-framed, and finds it difficult to find clothes in his size.

So, he resorts to "a mishmash of custom-tailored menswear, stuff for boys and even some ladies items."

He mixes floral print T-shirt with skinny jeans, a blazer and vintage footwear, and experiments with ladies' blazers over tailored shirts and trousers, and tops it all off with a vintage brooch.

He is totally into "inappropriately mixing everything in one go". Occasionally, he'd raid his parents' closet for wearable old things.

Why do you love it?

I was into vintage clothing during my student days in Russia four years ago. I admired what some of the older Russians wore, and the clothes looked like they came out straight from the 1950s or 1960s.

I also visited second-hand shops all over Europe during my carefree student days, which further fueled my preference for vintage.

Basically, I prefer clothes that looked different.

Wearing vintage also catapults my pathetic fantasy of being on-trend by wearing relatively cheap vintage/second-hand stuff that could well be an inspiration for many current runway shows.

Tips

Don't buy vintage because it's 'very new', but because of the rare designs. Patience helps, especially if you need to scour through bundles and bundles of used, campy clothes. I once found

Unique designs

A fan of vintage fashion for three years now, Kaelyn Choo describes her personal style as minimalist with a twist. She goes for simple outfits with fun accessories for that extra edge. She blogs about her penchant for vintage fashion at colourfulbuttons.blogspot.com

Why do you love it?

Vintage pieces offer one of a kind design (the cut or the print of the fabric). Most of the time, it is very difficult or rare to find another same piece. Chances of bumping into someone wearing the same piece are very, very slim. I love the individual-

an Emmanuel Ungaro jacket-shirt.

Best buys

Definitely this pair of high-heeled lace-ups I bought in Paris a few years ago. The element of dandy is quite evident here, mixed with a bit of femininity with its substantial heels. I feel taller every time I walk in these shoes - a much welcomed addition to my height!



Hafidzudin Zainal pairs a blazer with a t-shirt, vintage shoes and a hat to great effect.



Choo bought these vintage woven heels from etsy.com

1960s. For vintage shoes, purchase those made in Italy or Spain as their quality is good. Opt for leather shoes and chunky heels for durability.

Ask the seller about the item you are buying, especially when purchasing online.

Best buys

1980s Christian Dior RTW, from Bandung, Indonesia and woven leather sandals from etsy.com.

VINTAGE HAUNTS

The fun of wearing vintage is in the shopping and treasure finding. Our four vintage stylistas share their favourite hunting grounds.

Locally

The weekend flea market at Amcorp Mall, Petaling Jaya is a firm favourite. I Jumble Station in USJ, Old Town Thrift Shop in Petaling Jaya Old Town, and Bless shops around the Klang Valley. I Scoop in Plaza Damas, Kuala Lumpur. I Bundle shops all around the country. I Garage sales.

Overseas

Singapore - Sungei Road Thieves Market and Tanglin Mall Flea Market. London - various Salvation Army, Red Cross, Trinity Hospice shops, the Electric Ballroom in Camden Market, Portabello Market. Paris - Porte du Vanves, Porte du Montreuil, and lots of lovely second hand stores in the back-lanes of Marais. Melbourne - Camberwell Market on Sundays, thrift stores and opportunity shops. Japan - flea markets or more commonly known locally as "free market", visit www.freemarket-go.com for schedule.

Online
• www.ebay.com
• www.etsy.com
• blogshops