

EVERYTHING

OLD

IS

NEW

AGAIN

MAKING THE MOST OF CONSIGNMENT SHOPPING IN WEST CHESTER

By Kate Chadwick

Anyone who knows me well can attest to the fact that I'm not what you'd call a fashionista, nor could I be called "trendy" without irony. This is not to say that I don't like fashion; I do pay attention to it, I love the creativity of it, I'm just not much on... follow-through. My "style" usually consists of t-shirt dresses, flip-flops, and a baseball cap (or an occasional "real" hat) in spring and summer, and jeans/sweater/boots in fall and winter. Generally, I lean towards bohemian; I have a proclivity for strappy heels when dressing up, and I think Audrey Hepburn is the most perfect style icon who ever existed. Along with Katharine Hepburn. Oh, and Grace Kelly, although I'm not completely convinced she was human. And the older I get, the more I realize that there's only so much you can do about the changes in your face and body, but you can control how you dress yourself.

Long before rapper Macklemore thrust the concept of consignment shopping back into the zeitgeist in 2012 with his smash "Thrift Shop," I was a thrift shopper. Raised in a lower-middle income, working-class family, my wardrobe for most of my life consisted of second-hand and hand-me-down clothing (and later, home furnishings, but that's another story). Years ago, that meant the warehouse-like spaces of nonprofit organizations like Goodwill or Salvation Army stores, whose proceeds go towards job training and helping people with addiction issues, respectively. People donated things they no longer wore, or had cleaned out of an attic belonging to dear departed Aunt Betty. They're good stores serving great purposes and I continue to frequent them, but you took your chances with the quality and condition of merchandise back then.

Now, as a single mom, consignment shopping is practically a must. The very thought of spending \$200 on a pair of jeans horrifies me, given what I could do with that amount of money at the grocery store and gas pump. And, consignment shopping offers the added bonus of not only saving you money, it can make you money if you dig into your closet and weed out those pieces that are still serviceable but perhaps don't speak to you quite as loudly as they once did.

Consignment stores today have evolved into a destination shopping category in their own right, likely brought on by the twin issues of the economic downturn in the past decade or so, and the "green" trend of recycling and repurposing instead of throwing away. The stores are pleasant, dare I say chic places to shop, where you can enlist the help of a staff member or two if, by chance, you have no idea what the heck you're doing. Which is where I come in. Armed with a list of three local consignment shops to visit, and a budget of \$50 for each, in less than three hours, I returned to *The WC Press* office with three bags of clothes that I can't WAIT to wear.

GREENE STREET

106 West Gay St, 484-947-5562, greenestreet.com

My first stop was at Greene Street, and I'll admit two things right here: it was the only one of the three I'd visited before, and I've visited it approximately a kajillion times. It was my first time at their new Gay Street location; the size of the store is good, it's brightly lit, and they always have great music playing, always.

Jaycene greeted me as soon as I was in the door, and was a huge help to me in both familiarizing myself with the new place and helping me find a top to go with a particular skirt I was stuck on. Alas, it was not meant to be, and the skirt and I eventually parted ways. (It was a Banana Republic skirt, white background with pink, peach and black flowers for \$22.95, if you think you can give it a good home.) The staff was friendly and helpful, swooping in when I was carrying too many items and starting a dressing room for me. They nudged me gently out of my comfort zone by encouraging me to try things on I never have would have picked up on my own, always an eye-



FIRST, A COUPLE OF TIPS:

★ "Consignment shop" doesn't mean "yard sale." Please, don't try to negotiate a price unless there's a reason (a stain or a tear), and even then, only with a manager or an owner. Just like in a regular retail store, if there's a tag on something, that's the price.

★ I've had great luck walking into consignment shops with a specific item in mind, but keep your eyes open for something that might not even be on your radar. I went into a shop several months ago looking for a cocktail dress for a work event, which I got. But I spotted a fabulous long, corduroy coat on the clearance rack for \$14, and I can hardly wait to wear it this fall.

★ Keep consignment shops in mind for big events, like weddings or proms. Why spend hundreds of dollars on something that you know you'll only wear once? Don't spill any wine on it, have it cleaned, and consign it back. (And yes, I bought my wedding dress at a consignment shop for \$200.)

★ Don't forget accessories! All the places I visited here have scarves, belts, purses, jewelry and sunglasses.

opening experience. For instance, Jaycene suggested a pale, pinkish-purple silky blouse, and although I didn't buy it, I did learn that I can rock that color.

After much trial and error, I ended up with some great finds, and even stayed a bit under budget: a great Express dress in a fun print, which can be dressed up with pumps for work, or dressed down with black boots; I snagged a super-funky pair of dangly silver earring for \$12; and the big bargain of that stop was a brown Live A Little trench coat spotted on the clearance rack for \$8. That's eight dollars, with an "8." I couldn't NOT buy it, really.

Fun fact: I follow Greene Street on Instagram, once buying three of five pairs of boots posted in one photo, right over the phone. I also bought a dress over the phone, and a friend who lives near their Red Bank location (they have ten in PA, NJ and NY) picked it up for me to save on shipping. And they've also begun selling menswear in some of their locations.

CHRISTINE'S CONSIGNMENT BOUTIQUE

150 Westtown Rd, 610-692-9375, christinesconsignment.com

Christine's is called a "boutique" because it really feels like one. It is at once brimming with high-end merchandise, but somehow does not feel crowded; there is plenty of floor space to navigate between racks, and all of the items are art-



\$15



\$22



\$19

fully displayed. Christine and her staff also take the time to separate out specific brands toward which their clientele tend to gravitate—Chico's being one example—and those brands have their own racks, making this stop more efficient for the woman who knows exactly what she wants.

Because I was supposed to be making the most of the budget I was so graciously allotted for this article, I resisted the urge to blow my entire purse on a stunning, satin Alexander Wang vest top (because I'm always wearing that sort of thing, clearly).

Instead, under the watchful guidance of Christine and her accommodating staff, I was able to stay on my game. It almost felt like I was shopping with friends or family—I had no hesitation about popping out of the dressing room and calling "Yes or no?" and I know I'd get an honest, experienced answer. The payoff? Before I knew it, I'd purchased another dress—also gray, but shorter and infinitely more casual, a great pair of Guess dark-wash skinny jeans, a gorgeous peasant blouse perfect for fall, AND a pair of summer wedges (not pictured here because I put them right on and drove home in them).

Fun fact: Christine's has a brand-new section of the store, which sells brand-new special occasion wear—dresses AND accessories—something to keep in mind for mother-of-the-bride, or perhaps looking ahead to your next black-tie wedding or other formal affair.

CLOTHES MENTOR

1369 Wilmington Pk, 610-455-1500, clothesmentor.com

Okay, another admission: the size of this place overwhelmed me just a little bit—there's a lot going on in here. The great news is that it's all beautifully and precisely organized, so I got my bearings in no time. And I must have had that fish-out-of-water look going, because staff member Amy glided right up to me and offered her name and assistance if needed. By then, I'd already gathered a couple of things, including outrageous BCBG suede booties for \$24. And no, I have no idea whether I'll be able to walk in them, but I spotted them as soon as I arrived, they were miraculously my size, and I look forward to standing still in them all fall and winter.

I spotted a gray swing dress, perfect for the office, and which happened to match my fabulous booties. (Well, Amy told me I could wear them together; it didn't actually occur to me.) And she should know—she's one of Clothes Mentor's personal shoppers. They'll work with you in person or online to coordinate your next favorite outfit. She pointed out that my dress needed a necklace—something that wouldn't have occurred to me either, given that I'm an earring girl—and in minutes I had a pendant necklace for daytime, and a string of faux dark-gray pearls for night.

Fun fact: Most shops consign on a percentage basis—typically 40% to the consigner, 60% for the shop. Here at Clothes Mentor, they make you an offer and then pay you in cash on the spot when you bring your merchandise in. Also, while they have a two-year moratorium on what they'll accept, they take all seasons of clothing, all year. 



\$20



\$8



\$24



\$10