

SAMPLE: HOW-TO FEATURE ARTICLE

“Chic on the Cheap”

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When I read fashion features and browse the latest boutique offerings, the price tags often stop me cold. I am a self-professed tightwad. I can't remember the last time I paid full retail for anything other than underwear and socks. But I still want to look good.

Clothing bargains are all around for the finding. The catch is that you trade time for money. Which would you rather invest? I enjoy the hunt and the creativity, so I choose time, and I really don't spend all that much of it. Here are some of my favorite ways to boost my wardrobe on the cheap.

The most obvious is the clearance rack. The deeper the markdowns, the better. A \$40 famous-maker linen shirt marked down to \$9.99, with no visible damage, puts a smile on my face every time. But that shirt usually hides out among some really ugly sisters, so you've got to search diligently.

The same holds true for thrift stores. I recently found a brand-name tweed blazer for \$6.50 that originally cost about \$50. Last year's best find was a black and white boutique-originated blazer with the pockets still basted shut from the factory. The price? \$8.00. I wear it all the time. If you find something that works but could use a little pizzazz, swing by the fabric store on the way home, take the jacket in, and buy a card of new buttons to replace the bland ones it came with. Add a snazzy pin, and voila.

Speaking of which, can you sew on a button? Basic sewing skills will serve you well. If you don't have them, either learn, trade favors with a sewing friend, or hire a seamstress. Often just shortening or lengthening a skirt or pants can make the difference. Last spring I decided a pair of my black slacks would look better as capris, and that's what they became in about 30 minutes. Compare that to the time and fuel costs of shopping, not to mention the price of new capris. For the bohemian look so big right now, take a pair of jeans you already have, open up the outer leg seam from the hem to mid-calf, and insert a triangle of funky fabric – maybe even from another castoff garment. Use the same idea with a straight or A-line skirt. Designer separates, and you did it yourself.

All these sources work for accessories, too. One of my favorite belts of all time was a used tie. I knotted it around the hips of a tunic that started life as a knit dress before I shortened it by several inches. Discover retro pins at garage sales or thrift stores. Craft stores usually carry jewelry-making supplies -- you might find a new creative outlet that also produces one-of-a-kind necklaces and bracelets for pennies apiece. And do you know how easy it is to knit a simple scarf, yards long, out of funky yarn? You can even knit with ribbon or skinny

strips of fabric. Fun stuff. Learn to knit and you can make your own purses and hats, too.

Most stylists will tell you to invest money in quality basics. I agree. Nothing beats a well cut, well constructed garment in a luscious fabric, especially if the style is classic and can be updated with a change of accessories and complementing pieces. But who says you have to pay full retail? I like my go-to pair of black slacks even better, knowing they cost me \$29 instead of \$70 because I waited till January to buy them.

Expressing your own style in an up-to-date way doesn't have to cost much at all. The secrets are to spend more time than money and nurture your creative spirit.