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Issue No. 23

Never Mind the Quality, Feel the Width!

One reason women come shopping with me is that I save them from making expensive mistakes. It's SO easy when you are on your own to become overwhelmed by the volume of merchandise, the clever displays and, nowadays, the everlasting discounts. So as summer sales approach, I offer you *Patrick's Guide to the Sales*. This may turn into a rant; be prepared!



Sales are no longer just twice a year; there are season discounts virtually all the time. Most people don't realise that these days merchandise has a much shorter life on the sales floor, and there are reasons for this. In the US and this country, people have become obsessed with fast fashion and casual clothes, the perpetual jeans and a t-shirt. We have lost sight of buying for the long term, looking at the fabric, the attention to details and how the garments really work for you; most now just take into account the low price points.

This has mainly happened because the fashion industry is now driven by Third World economies, notably, at this time, China. They are churning out cheap goods in vast volumes. Worldwide it undermines what a living wage is for workers in these countries; they work for almost nothing. But it does not last. Many Chinese are now moving from the countryside into the cities and are demanding better wages. The next step therefore will be that countries such as Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand will be undercutting them. All this means is that UK manufacturers are now unprofitable unless they manufacture aboard.

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So be aware that when you go into a store for a great bargain, what you are really getting is a great low price. Once garments were sold with a 50 per cent mark-up (that is, double the trade price).

Nowadays, many retailers triple the base price so even when they mark down by 20 per cent, they are making a profit. There are exceptions, notably Primark. They only have a 12 per cent margin. As a result they can offer staggeringly low prices. And it works. They make their profits on the sheer volume of the cheap goods they sell.

Supermarkets such as Tesco and Asda also buy in vast volumes so again can offer ridiculously low prices. Shopping villages, some of which appear to be very upmarket, are different again. Here you are buying into the brand but not into fashion. Generally, these kinds of outlets offer bland styles or last year's ranges. This is fine if you are looking for a classic piece that will never date but it won't be on trend.

My golden rules are thus: Buy only

- What makes you look better?
- Fits into your lifestyle
- Fits into your current wardrobe

If you know you are likely to be over-influenced by price, I suggest you have the item put aside and go and have a coffee. Give it due thought. If you have time, look at other similar retailers and see if you can find the same garment at a better price.

Other pointers:

- Don't buy something to save. Wear it.
- The best time to buy shoes is in a sale but don't play Cinderella. If they are a little tight, you will never wear them!
- If you are not size 10 or 12, spend money on full price merchandise to get a fit.
- Never buy shapeless. We men still respond best to an hour-glass shape.

My advice during the sales is to head for the next season rails at the back of the store. They will have the new entire range, with the full look available, in every size. And it will be in the latest trend.



Just remember, retailers are not there to do you a favour. One perfect example, last Christmas Eve I went to Selfridges to look at the Burberry range stunning but very expensive. I went back on Boxing Day, when the sale had started but found all the marvellous styles I'd seen before had been removed in favour of sales goods, bland, boring but bearing the label.

See, I told you it would be a rant!

Patrick Swan

PS – Remember – 20% off for all returning shopping clients!