

IN STYLE

'Secondhand Rose' '90s anthem

Clothing shoppers have always pursued good quality at a good price. In this day of the shrinking dollar and downsizing, there's one small business that's not so small anymore—recycled clothing.

Jane Hamilton would know.

She deals in women's and children's clothing and accessories at The Clothes Cupboard, 510 Richardson Ave., at Carling.

"We may be the oldest consignment shop—20 years old—in the city," she says. "When we started out, no one really knew what consignment meant."

What it means is people recycling clothing, and earning money doing it.

Recycled clothing has always been the sensible way to dress children, who outgrow new clothes before they're out of the bag.

In the '90s, however, consignment stores have a new clientele.

At Little Anne's, 2445 St. Joseph Blvd., Orleans, Anne Taylor has been dealing in children's and maternity clothing for three years.

She's seen a rise in demand for quality maternity wear, spurred by the increasing number of professional women who continue to work through their pregnancies.

"I don't take a lot of casual stuff," Taylor says. "It's the business clothes people are looking for."

More of those professional women than ever before are continuing to shop in consignment stores long after the baby's in daycare.

And that means they're also keeping those stores supplied with current, fashionable business wear from major clothing houses—Alfred Sung, Simon Chang, Jaeger, and the like.

Lucie Thivierge, owner of Le Prêt-a-Reporter, 148A Dalhousie St., says customers are pleased they can get quality for their dollar by buying secondhand.

"People are realizing that prices are really atrocious in the stores," she says. "Before, there was a lot of prejudice about secondhand clothing, but now, there's less."

Le Prêt-a-Reporter has carried women's clothing and accessories for three years, and has seen a substantial increase in its professional female clientele.

Convenience

Most consignment stores work on a 50-50 basis. When an item is sold, its owner and the shop each receive 50% of the sale.

Selling clothes by consignment is simpler, more convenient and more profitable than selling at a garage sale.

At The Clothes Secret, 43 Seneca St., owner Valerie MacIntosh deals in women's clothing and accessories.

MacIntosh figures business has probably doubled in the six years she's been open.

"It's a booming business," she says, "but

you have to establish a good clientele to bring clothes into the store as well as a good clientele coming in to buy them."

Hilary Isherwood recycles children's clothing and maternity wear at Three Bags Full, 501 Hazeldean Rd., Kanata.

There's no point in trying to recycle children's clothes from many chain and discount stores where parents often shop, she says, because recycling isn't built into the quality.

"We're going with the labels people are looking for," she says. "The good quality stuff is what people want."

And that means the designer labels for kids—The Gap, Oshkosh, Roots—that are so expensive to buy new.

"And when your child's only going to be in it for six months," says Isherwood, "it makes sense to buy secondhand."

About the only slice of the market most consignment stores aren't pulling in is the male shopper.

"It's hard to get men to give up their stuff," says Hamilton.

When most men shop for clothing, they want rows of charcoal-gray suits in their size.

As well, the average male shopper hangs on to his dress/business wardrobe longer. Fashion changes, but men are less aware of and driven by those changes than are women.

"We are seeing more interest from the younger generation of men," Hamilton says. "The old guard aren't likely to shop this way."

As well as appealing to today's canny shopper, consignment stores are busy places for another very '90s reason.

"It's the idea of recycling, too," says Thivierge. "A lot of my customers say, 'Put the price on it that you want, and I'll be happy to know that someone is getting use out of it, enjoying it.'"

Proximity

And shoppers don't have to worry much about meeting their new power suit's former owner across the boardroom table.

The Clothes Secret receives items from former Ottawans living elsewhere, and from out-of-towners who've visited the shop and liked what they've seen.

The Clothes Cupboard has a large group of friends who were once "just" customers.

"We have people who drop in several times a week," says Hamilton. "We get to know them, they bring along their grandchildren. Their mothers and sisters bring things in, and buy things, when they're visiting."

People today find shopping time at a premium, at the bottom of the list of things to do.

Imagine walking into a store and handing over clothes everyone's seen you in too many times. Imagine receiving cash for the items you dropped off last week which have since been sold. Imagine spending 15 minutes and going home with a few top-quality, high-fashion gems nobody's seen you in.

That's consignment store shopping.

Pull into Il Garage for a tasty fill-up

The food's great, and the decor is unique, but there's another reason people keep coming back to Il Garage Italian Restaurant, says owner Diane Robert.

"It's the atmosphere, with the red and white chequered tablecloths, and the candles on the tables."

Il Garage, at 225 Preston St., has been open for a year and a half.

Its motto is "Come tune up your hungry engine," which makes perfect sense when you realize the restaurant's in a converted garage, and the best features of the building remain.

"We kept the garage doors, and added big windows," Diane says. "The ceilings are 20 feet high, so it's light and airy."

The delicious pizzas—with traditional Italian thin crust—are named Lamborghini and the like.

Il Garage's chef is terrific, says Diane. She's hard pressed to name a specialty because everything's consistently excellent, but she mentions calamari, and the fact that a regular diner recently brought eight people in for one of the spectacular penne dishes.

"They loved it," she says. "They wound up having it very spicy, and they said it was great."

Monday to Friday, Il Garage is open for lunch and dinner, Saturday and Sunday for dinner only, but they're open "as late as we have customers," says Diane.

The portions are hearty, and the tasty, traditional Italian meals are always served piping hot. And you can complement your meal with a bottle of robust Italian red, or any other beverage you choose.

There's live local entertainment as well, from Thursday to Sunday.

The staff of mainly university students are welcoming and pleasant, and receive many compliments about the service.

A summer evening is the perfect time to visit Il Garage's spacious sidewalk patio.

And there's a large parking lot behind the restaurant for patrons' convenience.

"People come for the food," says Diane, "but they tell us it's a very homey place. They feel very comfortable."

Drop in to Il Garage Italian Restaurant at 225 Preston St., just north of Gladstone. For reservations, please call 236-7278.

Your hungry engine will be purring.