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PARTY PLANNER

Upscale resale gives you luxe for less

By JENNIFER M. MACLEOD
Special to the CJN

Customers browsing through Deja Vu, Theresa Lobraico's upscale Markham clothing store, sometimes ask why there are dry-cleaning tags on many of the clothes.

That's their first realization that they're in a resale shop.

"I take that as a compliment," Lobraico says.

For anyone who associates resale clothing and consignment shops with dowdy dresses, clunky therapeutic shoes and the smell of mothballs, Deja Vu (www.dejavuboutique.ca, 905-472-9566; consignment by appointment only) offers luxe for less.

And why not? Why pay \$300 to \$450 for a pair of Cambio jeans when Deja Vu carries previously owned pairs for around \$100?

At the more formal end of the spectrum are tremendous savings on evening wear, such as an elegant Vera Wang gown that retails for more than \$1,000 while Deja Vu's price is \$400. A \$1,200 Hugo Boss suit might resell for \$350, and accessories such as Coach and Fendi bags all come with similarly streamlined price tags. Other brands might include Versace, Votre Nom and Hilary Radley.

Deja Vu also carries a selection of new and sample merchandise from Frank Usher, Dusk and more.

What you won't find on the well-stocked racks at Deja Vu are mainstream brands available at any retail or resale shop.

"Every woman has clothes in her closet already," says Lobraico, who also offers in-home wardrobe and style consulting. "What she wants is something spectacular that you're not going to see everywhere else."

"I want wow," says client Lee, who drives in often from Pickering with her mother, Marian. "Anything you've seen in Vogue, you're going to see here."

That's especially important if you're a hostess looking for evening wear.

"The event is going to cost a fortune," but clothes don't have to, Lobraico says.

And even if you're just a guest, "you're going to look great, and no one has to know [it's resale] if you don't want them to."

With 15 years' experience, Lobraico only accepts for consignment "those pieces I feel I have a market for."

Her basic conditions are that clothing and accessories be current "within two years," of designer quality, and impeccably dry cleaned in like-new condition.

Whether in clients' homes or in the store, Lobraico is proud of her honesty, something girlfriends might not offer for fear of hurt feelings.

She deals it out gently and with a sense of humour.

"Customers thank me," she says.

It's not about putting them down, but rather steering them to clothes that look great.

"If it's not flattering, I'd just say 'Let's find something else.'"

Often, clients want more than clothes — they're looking to change their whole style.

Whether going through a life change, moving or downsizing, they want a style that will better reflect their personality.

"Fashion is trendy. Style is timeless,"



You don't have to go broke to purchase an upscale designer gown.

says Lobraico. "Style is your own personal signature."

Lobraico actually speaks at a women's shelter about image and how clothes can empower women.

"It's almost like dressing from the inside out."

She has also led government seminars on dressing for job interviews and in the workplace, and for self esteem.

As a single mother of three who launched her own business, she believes with a passion in what she does and offers far more than just a business transaction.

She's in touch regularly with an e-mail list of about 450 regular clients and will occasionally even e-mail them about a "surprise sale" with just a couple of days' notice.

Lobraico will also call one of her regulars if something comes in that she feels they'd love.

"It's like having a personal shopper," she says.

From casual to black-tie, from bar mitzvahs to galas, whether you're hosting or just enjoying the event, Deja Vu is sure to have the perfect outfit in a full range of current styles.

"They don't have to know I paid a fraction of the cost," because the end result is exactly the same, Lobraico says.

"People say, 'Wow! That's a great outfit.'"

Only your wallet will know the difference.

Other fashion stores advertising in this supplement are Crawford Boys, 416-782-8137; Guido Martella, 416-638-2018; Inspiration Fine Lingerie, 905-886-7361; K.Barketti, 416-225-6733; and St.Honore Ladies' Fashions, 416-449-2672.



These designer purses are the real thing, not inferior knockoffs.