



# Putting on the Ritz

For true glamour and style, the only way is vintage, says Emma Hughes

**C**AST your mind back to the last time you went clothes shopping on the high street. It was, in all likelihood, a rather uninspiring quick fix—the retail equivalent of beans on toast for supper. Now, imagine trying on a dress hand-stitched with thousands of sequins that makes you feel like Marilyn Monroe, a pair of Italian driving gloves made from butter-soft kid leather, or a tailored suit that transforms you into Humphrey Bogart in *The Big Sleep*—and all for less than the price of a tank of petrol.

Welcome to the world of vintage clothing.

Those lucky enough to have an attic full of hand-me-downs may not even need to leave the house to experience the joys of second-hand style. But where on earth do you start? Curator and stylist Stefanie Braun, who showcased her collection of exquisite Grace Kelly-style dresses at the V&A last year, says that the most important thing is that 'you love the piece, that it reminds you of someone you care about and that it fits you well'.

However, caution should always be your





watchword. 'Moths are the biggest problem. Once you have them, it's very difficult to get rid of them, so make sure you wash and dry-clean everything, and keep pieces in separate clothes bags with lots of lavender.' Twenty-four hours in the freezer should get rid of particularly resilient pests.

When trying on your new acquisitions, be gentle with them—they are antiques, after all. 'A 1930s dress has seen 80 years of wear already, and we're used to modern, stretchy fabrics.' As someone who once split a vintage skirt on the way to a party and spent the rest of the evening preserving her modesty with a series of bulldog clips, I can attest to the truth of this.

Wardrobe malfunctions aside, the joy of vintage is its quality. 'Back in the 1950s, men's shoes from high-street brands were as well made as a pair of Church's today,' says tailor David Saxby, who has been running gentlemen's outfitters Old Hat for 20 years. However, although the calibre

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of materials is unlikely to be an issue with inherited items, fit may well be. 'Vintage shirts tend to be generously cut, but on a tailored jacket, sleeve length is going to be a problem.' If you've fallen in love with a too-small treasure, fear not—according to Mr Saxby, it can serve as the model for a brand-new piece of clothing.

What if you're building a collection from scratch? According to Deborah Woolf, who has supplied Richard Curtis and the BBC with vintage clothing and accessories, rushed, last-minute buys are a no-no. 'Try

**Make mine a martini: when you're wearing vintage, every hour feels like cocktail hour**

everything on—bias-cut dresses often look small on the hanger, for example, but can come up bigger.' If you're planning a trip to a vintage-clothes fair, where changing facilities are likely to be primitive (or non-existent), 'take the measurements of something similar that fits you well beforehand', and go armed with a tape measure to size up the merchandise. Miss Woolf also suggests the vintage novice should start small. 'A vintage handbag is a great place to begin, and scarves are a lovely way to wear vintage on a smaller scale. They not only transform an outfit, but can also be works of art in their own right.'

So, whether you're browsing in one of the boutiques listed on the next page or sorting through a trunk of family furs, happy hunting. And remember, as Yves Saint Laurent once said, fashions fade, but style is eternal. 





You can step back in time with the fashions of the past. At the annual Goodwood Revival (above), visitors dressed in vintage gather to re-create the golden age of motor racing



Vintage fairs and markets are full of gems, but remember to take your tape measure

## Dial V for Vintage

### Cloud Cuckoo Land

1950s cardigans in ice-cream shades and *Mad Men*-style cocktail dresses a speciality  
6, Charlton Place, London N1 8AJ (020-7354 3141)

### Deborah Woolf Vintage

For mint-condition pieces from the 1860s to the 1980s, from Victorian capes to Dior and Ossie Clark. Eddie the poodle is on hand to provide a second opinion  
28, Church Street, London NW8 8EP and across the road in Alfies Antique Market (07767 437732; [www.deborahwoolf.com](http://www.deborahwoolf.com))

### Fraubraun

Browse the online catalogue of carefully sourced vintage items first, then make an appointment to visit Stefanie and try them on  
*Ermine Mews, Laburnum Street, London E2 8BF* ([www.fraubraun.com](http://www.fraubraun.com))

### Nina's Hair Parlour

Nina and her team will expertly match your hair to the era of your outfit  
*Alfies Antique Market, London, NW8 8DT* (020-7723 1911; [www.ninasvintageandretrohair.com](http://www.ninasvintageandretrohair.com))

### Nostalgia

For a selection of pretty vintage fabrics, ribbons, buttons and lace  
*No 1, Market Place, Shepton Mallet, Somerset, BA4 5AZ* ([www.nostalgia-stonehouse.co.uk](http://www.nostalgia-stonehouse.co.uk))

### Old Hat

Hats, cravats, waistcoats and vintage-inspired suits made from a choice of more than 700 rolls of tweeds and silks  
60-62, Fulham High Street, London SW6 3LQ (020-7610 6558; [www.davidsaxby.co.uk](http://www.davidsaxby.co.uk))

### Past Caring

Full of miraculously well-preserved pieces from the 1920s and 1930s  
6, Chapel Yard, Holt, Norfolk, NR25 6HG (01263 713771; <http://pastcaring.net>)

### The London Vintage Fashion, Textiles and Accessories Fair

A regular extravaganza that attracts connoisseurs from all over the country  
(020-8543 5075; [www.pa-antiques.co.uk/londonvintagefashionfair.html](http://www.pa-antiques.co.uk/londonvintagefashionfair.html))

### What Katie Did

For an authentic, wasp-waisted silhouette, invest in a glamorous set of reproduction vintage underwear  
26, Portobello Green, London W10 5TZ (0845 430 8743; [www.whatkatieidid.com](http://www.whatkatieidid.com))