



▲ Shop smarter and you won't have to cut down on mall trips

Shop Till You Drop

We all love to shop, but watching our dollars makes it tougher. Thankfully, there's no need to avoid the mall altogether – it's just about knowing how to buy better!

American actress Bo Derek once said, "Whoever said money can't buy happiness simply didn't know where to go shopping." And although the blonde bombshell's choice of boutique would most likely be located along Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, knowing where to shop and what to buy when you arrive will not only make you look and feel like a million dollars but also – potentially – save you money.

We sat down with Annalisa Armitage, well-known style guru behind consulting firm, My Image Consultant, and President of the Sydney Chapter of the Association of Image

Consultants International to find out how to maximise your fashion dollars.

Q: Does fashion shopping on a budget mean you can't look like a million dollars?

Annalisa Armitage: Looking a million dollars has much more to do with the colour, co-ordination, fit, fabric and the body language of the wearer, than the amount of money spent on an outfit. A \$5,000 suit that fits poorly will look worse than an \$800 suit that fits beautifully. Someone who thinks they look great and who stands up straight, walks with purpose and smiles openly whilst making eye contact will

TOP 5 KIDS' FASHION TIPS

Outfits on a budget

- Set up or join a clothes swap with other parents.
- Get second hand uniforms through their school.
- Leggings are great – they stretch and can be worn at any length!
- Buy shoes that go with everything!
- Shop in pre-loved retail stores.



▲ Buy clothes that go with many other outfits in your wardrobe to ensure they don't waste away in the back of the cupboard.

look fantastic no matter what they're wearing. Don't fall into the trap of thinking the more you spend the better you'll look. It is, of course, much easier to look great in cheaper clothes and fabrics if you have a great body and the glowing skin of youth. The older you are, the more help you need from the cut and quality of fabric to help you look terrific – but only if the clothes fit you well!

Q: What can people do to ensure they get the 'biggest bang for their buck'?

AA: To get the biggest bang for your buck make sure you purchase only clothes that go with at least three other items you already have. Make sure that you love the item as you'll be wearing it a lot if you've followed the previous rule. Never keep something for 'best'. Ladies, if you need to buy something for a special occasion such as a wedding, afterwards consider how you could change the outfit by dressing it down and wearing it differently – for example, wear the item with boots and a cardigan for less formal events. This often works well to funk up a dress that was worn initially for its elegance. It also gives you the chance to wear it many times and into the cooler months.

Always ask for a discount when you buy anything – no matter where you're shopping. They can only say no and often they say yes or

at least if they can't give a discount they will throw in a gift.

Q: Are factory outlets the way to go?

AA: Factory outlets often have good bargains but you have to be willing to do a couple of things: sift through a lot of clothes before you find something you like then hope they have it in your size; try to work out why no one else wanted it and therefore why it didn't sell in the main stores (maybe everyone else saw the flaw you didn't see at first look) then consider what you're going to wear it with. Often what's in the outlets is something from last year and it will be difficult to find something in the shops now to go with it. Remember, even \$10 spent on an item you don't wear is money wasted – even if its full original retail price was \$100, you haven't saved \$90, you've wasted \$10.

Q: What garments should consumers be focusing on, when on a budget?

AA: When you're on a budget – or actually any time – never spend a lot of money on a trend as this will be an item that you will wear for a maximum of three years if you get into it early. Spend your money on classic items that you can wear and wear. An example of this will be men's suits. As the seasons go by, lapels become thinner or become wider. A suit that you expect to keep for a number of years that

“A \$5,000 suit that fits poorly will look worse than an \$800 suit that fits beautifully”

you spend good money on should always be bought with classic sized lapels (the lapel is $\frac{1}{2}$ the width to the shoulder). This will never date! Be trendy with shirt colours, haircuts and other items that don't cost as much as a suit and that you don't expect to wear for as long.

Q: What's the best way to build an outfit/ensemble when on a budget?

AA: When cash is tight, first begin your shopping expedition in your own wardrobe. Revamp existing outfits and items by changing buttons, adding trimmings and developing different combinations. Many wardrobes are full of the classic colours navy, black, charcoal and brown. These are terrific 'staples' and when paired with burnt orange, or magenta or pale blue, or olive or yellow or any other accent colour many different looks can be created. Try unique combinations of layers, short over long, long over short sleeves; scarves, jewellery and knock out shoes.

Q: What should we remember fashion-wise when shopping to get the best looks?

AA: Common shopping mistakes are going for black, black, black! Spending too much money on trend items; shopping in a hurry, buying items that don't go with anything in your wardrobe. Buying two or more of the same items in different colours – you will get bored of them. The exception are things like T-shirts, singlets and other layer items.

Q: What are the best budget accessories?

AA: The best accessories are cufflinks for men; a great haircut, and handbags for women. Buy in department store sales for most variety. And, of course, a great smile with confident body language. Great lipstick also works well.

Q: What is the key to budget businesswear for men and women?

AA: The key to budget businesswear for men and women is buying clothes that suit the work environment, suit your body and work with your colouring. This way you wear them a lot and get a great 'cost per wear' ratio. There is false economy to buy cheap suits – they don't last as long, and they don't give you the stature that a good suit can provide.

Q: What is the key to budget eveningwear?

AA: If you are young, have a great figure and great skin you will look great in anything! I have seen women look amazing in dresses that they have paid less than \$100 for. When buying

a dress, think about buying something that has fewer embellishments – it will often be cheaper to add your own sequins or ribbon. This way, of course, also means that you won't turn up wearing the same thing as someone else. In addition consider hiring a suit or a dress for the night instead of buying one or consider possible resale value. There are many shops around who specialise in buying and reselling good quality clothes. These can also be great places to find a great outfit. There is no need to buy new! Again, by being a little inventive you will ensure no one else is wearing what you are!

Q: Kids get through clothes so quickly, what's the best budget-conscious method to buy for kids?

AA: Same principle for kids as adults – ensure they wear everything they have. Be specific around birthdays and Christmas to family and friends regarding the types of clothes the kids need and like – this way random items don't make their way into the wardrobe. Make sure the kids like what you buy and get them involved with the 'capsule' strategy (all items working together). This way they will wear each item and you can make lots of different outfits. If they haven't worn them so much that they have worn out, develop alliances with parents who have children both older and younger than yours – work out a clothes swap community for casual clothes. Most schools have ways to purchase school uniforms second hand. See if you can advertise for the clothes swap in this way.

TOP 5 FASHION TIPS

Look great for less

- Never scrimp on the perfect 'V' (the area from between the breast to the shoulders) as this is always in the peripheral vision of anyone talking to you.
- Wear what you love.
- Combine items from designers and budget retail outlets to make fantastic looks.
- You don't have to be a slave to fashion; you just need to look not out of date – so do you really need something new?
- Don't expect a perfect fit straight from the shop. Factor in the cost of alterations.



▲ Follow our simple advice and you can look amazing and feel great for so much less!