



Cut-price Paris chic

Margaret Ambrose, who now spends part of her year in France, reports on the best Parisian shopping bargains

PHOTOGRAPHED BY THE AUTHOR AND BY JACK YAN

I GOT IT IN PARIS,' said my friend Rachel, flicking her hair. The expressions of our lunch companions showed they were impressed. Rachel was wearing a sheer Gucci shirt, which was stunning, but the truth was, the same shirt was hanging in the window of a Gucci store not 50 m from where we were lunching. What really made it special was not that it was a designer label. It was a designer garment from Paris. In fact it wasn't a garment at all. It was a piece.

In the '50s, Audrey Hepburn travelled to Paris every few months to be outfitted by Hubert de Givenchy. Other movie stars made the trip also, because it was a universally accepted fact that garments purchased in Paris were that much more special than all others. And even though France's leading designers—Dior, Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent, and yes even Givenchy—have stores in practically every major city in the world, the mystique of buying couture in Paris remains.

When I first arrived in Paris, I was stunned by the extent to which my friends who lived there embraced designer couture. Regular young women on regular wages—no matter what their circumstances, they all had items of designer clothing in their wardrobe. The mystery deepened when I discovered the cost of actually living in Paris. How could these women, many of whom earned less than me, afford to buy high fashion in Paris?

A few shopping days (and a lot of pleading) later, my friends shared with me their secret: buying designer labels on a budget is possible. It's just a case of knowing where to go and what to look for.

Select your pieces

TO BEGIN WITH, not every item of clothing needs to come with a label. And nor should it. Plain-coloured T-shirts and skivvies look the same no

matter where they are purchased. Sure, they're not going to last but then what white T-shirt ever does?

For basic items, the names you need to know are **Tati** and **Monoprix**. Tati is a French institution and a popular shopping destination even the most well-heeled Parisian women. Monoprix is classed as a supermarket, but many outlets stock a great variety of reasonably priced items. Both have stores all over Paris.

Discount designer stores

CUT-PRICED COUTURE is available in Paris, if you know where to go. If you've got a bit of time, or enjoy the thrill of discovering the bargain of a lifetime, visit **Le Mouton à Cinq Pattes**, in the 6th. You'll find a multitude of designer labels for men and women, originating from fashion shows from around Europe. This store is crammed with boxes and you have to be prepared to rummage. Stay focused—Paris is full of boutiques with tales of designer-label gems picked up at a fraction of the boutique price.

The shopping experience at **L'Habilleur**, in the 3rd, is more user-friendly (stock is sorted and arranged by label) and bargains are guaranteed. Stocking labels such as Helmut Lang and Martine Sitbon, prices start from 50 per cent off. L'Habilleur sells largely end-of-line pieces and items used in catwalk shows, although unless you're built like Naomi Campbell, chances are you won't be taking home one of these.

For the largest number of designer bargains in one place, pend your visit to **rue d'Alésia** in the 14th. The street is lined with stores that stock from previous designer collections, and include the aptly-named **Cacharel Stock**, **SR Store**, which sells Sonia Rykiel, and Georges Rech's **GR Stock**. If the fashion houses didn't sell it, these stores



OPPOSITE PAGE: Montmartre, facing the Grands Boulevards. L'Espace Créateurs is near here. ABOVE AND RIGHT: Scenes from the seventh arrondissement. FAR RIGHT: Note for food: Fauchon, at 36, avenue de la Motte-Picquet.



Paris shopping address book

Le Mouton à Cinq Pattes
19, rue Grégoire-de-Tours, Paris 6e
33 1 43.29.73.56

Mi-Prix
27, boulevard Victor-Hugo
Paris 15e
33 1 48-28-42-48

L'Habilleur
44, rue de Poitou, Paris 3e
33 1 48-87-77-12

Le Dépôt-Vente de Buci-Bourbon
6, rue Bourbon-le-Chateau, Paris 6e
33 1 46-34-45-05

GR Stock
110, rue d'Alésia, Paris 14e
33 1 45-40-87-73

Cacharel Stock
114, rue d'Alésia, Paris 14e
33 1 45-42-53-04

SR Store
64, rue d'Alésia, Paris 14e
33 1 43-95-06-13

Lundi Bleu
23-5, rue du Cherche Midi
Paris 6e
33 1 42-22-47-94

Diapositive
74, rue d'Alésia, Paris 14e
33 1 45-39-97-27

Kiliwatch
64, rue Tiquetonne, Paris 2e
33 1 42-21-17-37

But wait, there's more

A FEW PLACES that I'd add to Margie's selection. In St-Germain, shoe lovers must check out **Lundi Bleu**, which is the diffusion line of Jean-Paul Barriol. These are made in Spain and cost about 40 per cent less than the French-made ones.

For clothing, **Diapositive** (which has several stores around Paris) is usually a good place for bargains.

Get second-hand at **Kiliwatch** where the hip young crowd go for vintage in Paris.

Avoid the big shopping names like Galeries Lafayette and the others in the Grands Boulevards. They're great for having it all under one roof, but be prepared to pay a premium for the lovely location. If you have the time, it's better to go on an adventure.

For those who prefer not to speak the lingo, there are vending machines in the Métro that are easy to use, and a 10-trip book of tickets presents good value for those wishing to divide shopping over several days. Cabs can get pricey and you should save your euros for the airport run.—JACK YAN

Don't be alarmed at the thought of wearing items from a season or two before. It's now called 'vintage' and is popular amongst celebrities, including Julia Roberts, who accepted her Academy Award in a 1982 Valentino gown.

If your idea of vintage is couture that had its heyday longer than a few seasons ago, check out **Le Dépôt-Vente de Buci-Bourbon** in the 6th. It's a favourite haunt of Kate Moss and Hélène Christensen and sells hats, coats, dresses and accessories from the '60s.

Funky designer threads

IT SOUNDS OBVIOUS, but needs to be said, that Dolce & Gabbana looks the same no matter in what city the wearer swans around. What sets Parisian women apart in the style stakes is their ability to stamp their own personal mark on their outfits. They do this by teaming up with couture with funkier, more cutting edge items created by the up-and-coming designers.

You can sample a huge variety of young talent at **L'Espace Créateurs**, located at Forum des Halles. This store sells the creations of around 50 young designers—some will stir your imagination, others will just leave you bewildered.

Make sure you check out **rue des Gardes** in the district of Golden Square, near Montmartre. The dull, concrete housing commission apartment blocks may not give the immediate impression of cutting-edge fashion, but thanks to the Fédération Française du Prêt-à-Porter it's home to some of the hottest new fashion. The Fédération has selected 14 young designers to work and sell their wares in their eight boutiques in rue des Gardes. You're bound to find that special and unusual item there.

Did someone say shoes?

OF COURSE, no matter how many designer names you have on your body, an outfit is never complete without a pair of exceptional shoes. Step into **Mi-Prix**, in the 15th, and you could be walking away with shoes and accessories by Gucci, Prada and Alaïa, priced at up to 70 per cent off the normal retail price. •

Based in Melbourne, Vic., Margaret Ambrose is an occasional correspondent to both online and print editions *Lucire*. She is an editor at theLounge.com.au. On February her book, *How to Be French* (New Holland Publishers, 2005) debuted.