

Vintage Buying and the Online Marketplace  
Meghan DeSouza, Owner of Secondhand Swank  
March 5, 2014

Summary by Natasha Cummings

It was not that long ago that wearing something someone else had worn was seen as vulgar or disgusting. One particular branch of secondhand clothing is vintage buying, which has become a new craze in the fashion industry. Megan DeSouza, a graduate from the University of Rhode Island Textile Merchandising and Design program, is currently pursuing a career in this field. She previously worked at an esteemed vintage wear store called Circa Vintage Wear which was named one of the best vintage wear stores in the country by *GQ Magazine*. She now has her own online “store” on Etsy, where she sells vintage pieces she picks up at thrift stores, yard sales, flea markets, online, estate sales, other vintage stores, or from individuals she meets. This “new” trend of “vintage-wearing” has the potential to continue for the foreseeable future both in stores and in the digital world. Without the digital capabilities of today’s technology, the popularity of vintage wearing would not be as widespread as it is today.

Not to be confused with “retro” or “kitsch,” for something to be considered “vintage,” it must be at least twenty years old. Retro only looks like something old, but was actually made less than twenty years ago; and “kitsch” is something that is kind of ugly (and unique), but people like it anyways. The majority of people that like vintage wear it because it is usually “one-of-a-kind” or incredibly unique. Others might have a vintage piece that has been passed down through their family or the piece might have a high monetary value or they are vintage “lifestylers” (they wear vintage all day every day), or they might just like the “treasure hunt” appeal of finding vintage items.

There is an art to buying vintage. It takes a lot of knowledge about labels, design details, materials, prints, and dress revivals. Megan DeSouza follows four golden rules when buying vintage: just because it is old does not mean it is good; be patient with yourself, you will make mistakes, you will lose money and have some items forever, and you will learn and expand your knowledge through these mistakes; never turn down an offer to take a look at “some old stuff that was my mom’s,” you never know what people may have, they could surprise you; and lastly, you are not buying for yourself. When selling vintage it is important to figure out a few things before you start: What kind of vintage “store” do you want to have? What will be sold there? Where will you sell it? Online or in the real world? Who will you sell it to? Where will you get your vintage items from? It takes time management skills, patience, knowledge, passion, money, tough skin, courage and perseverance, a sense of adventure, an open mind, the ability to adapt and be flexible, and being a little crazy helps too. Promoting on social media (especially Facebook, Tumblr and Wanelo), in person, and on business cards can help bring people who have vintage items to sell to you. Some companies online have “vintage-only” aspects like Etsy, eBay and Storenvy. Selling in the real world can have its own advantages, such as personal interaction and selling, customers have the ability to try on, touch, and see details in the merchandise, and there are no shipping costs. However, online you can reach more customers, save on costs of owning a store and there is no risk of damage to the merchandise. Whichever platform vintage is sold on, the community is

always competitive, good-spirited and people work together to help each other find what vintage items they may need.

Many people are becoming involved in vintage buying and some have even made it their passion, like Megan DeSouza. Dita Von Teese, a well-known lover of vintage clothing, can be seen on any day strutting down the street in her favorite vintage dress; her vintage style is not only a social trend, but it has become her passion. "I love vintage clothes because they seem to make extravagance less costly to obtain, and I like to imagine the story behind each piece. Who wore it, where did she wear it, and who did she meet? Was it her favorite hat? Did she save up for it? I love the mystery of vintage clothes," says Von Teese. The excitement Von Teese and DeSouza feel about vintage buying is exploding across the globe. As a result, we will be seeing a lot more vintage style in years to come.