

September Lesson of the Month:

THE MATH BEHIND BUDGET-DRESSING

By Lauryn Prattes

Monday

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One of many fashion myths is that wearing designer labels is the only way to look fashionable. Of course, designer labels are generally synonymous with beautiful designs, but that does not mean you cannot find similar items at much lower prices. That said, there is a thin line between dressing on a budget and looking cheap. These guidelines will help you look fabulous without spending thousands of dollars.

Mix high-end pieces with lower-priced items. This will make the inexpensive clothes look like they cost way more than they actually did. When you find yourself wanting a high-priced piece, you must establish the item's "wear-ability" before forking over the cash. This unofficial equation will help determine whether an item is worth any amount money:

$$\frac{\text{Cost of Item}}{\text{Predicted Times Worn}} = \text{Cost Per Wear (CPW)}$$

Take a \$250 pair of jeans for example. Although that may seem like a lot, most people wear their jeans at least 25-30 times, which makes the CPW \$10 and the jeans a much more reasonably-priced option than they seemed before. As a general rule, any item with a CPW over \$25 is not a smart investment.

As with most rules, this one has exceptions. Certain one-time-wear, special-occasion items can be considered worth the price if they make you look and feel fabulous—but not if buying said item will bounce your rent check. If you do decide to splurge on such a piece, then mix and match it with inexpensive items, making sure they don't look as cheap as the price tags suggest.

A few things to take into consideration are as follows:

1. Note the materials used. Oftentimes, fabrics like spandex or satin will cheapen a garment. If you have trouble making up your mind, ask yourself if you would still purchase an item if it cost twice as much. If you answer, "No," than your interest level is likely an impulse reaction to the price tag and not the item itself.
2. An equally important factor is fit. Many inexpensive items don't offer the same great cut of their more expensive cousins. Small fit-related problems could be resolved with simple alterations, but greater issues, like poorly-sewn seams (which can cause an item to pull or pucker in certain places), may not be repairable.
3. On the flip-side, if you find a great basic piece at a low price, stock up on a few in various colors. Accessories are also great to accumulate because a collection of jewelry, scarves and clutches can be acquired without breaking the bank and allow you to endlessly change the face of your wardrobe.
4. Lastly, it is important to treat all items with care—regardless of their cost. The best way to prevent clothing from unraveling after a few wears is through dry-cleaning. If this is not within your means, consider hand washing, setting your washing machine on the delicate cycle or tumble drying with a fabric softener to keep even those great deals looking high-end.

