



... Where *Style* Meets Purpose

Recession Chic: 10 Affordable Style Strategies

With consumer confidence levels low, even the most enthusiastic shoppers are acting with caution. Some are even cutting back as the recession progresses. According to The NPD Group's Economy Tracker (March 2009), confidence levels have dropped to 36.7, down from 38 in October. The number gives reason to pause since on this firm's consumer confidence scale, 100 signifies "very confident," and 0 marks "very concerned."



But an economic slowdown shouldn't get in the way of strong personal style. With a little ingenuity and creativity, you can dress well without breaking the bank.

1. The closet audit. Try each item on and ask yourself: Does it reflect your needs, your coloring, and your shape? Remove everything that doesn't fit or flatter--and anything you're not comfortable wearing.

The Pareto Principle has taught us that 80% of most effects are netted from 20% of the causes. That holds true in wardrobe too, as most people are wearing 20% of their clothing 80% of the time. Ensure that you look your best every time you step out the door by trimming your wardrobe to consist only of the best 20. Consider donating gently-worn professional clothing to a local charity.

2. Get thee to a consignment shop! Shifts in the economy have meant that resale is no longer a thrifty shopper's best-kept secret. According to a 2009 survey by the National Association of Resale and Thrift Shops, 83.4 percent of member shops have experienced a rise in new customers since 2008, and 31.7 percent are receiving higher quality items.

3. Mend, clean and repair. Everyone has a blouse that needs to go to the dry cleaner, a hemline that needs mending, or a button that needs to be replaced. And while these items languish on your to-do list, your clothes remain unworn.

Take stock of what remains in your closet. Make sure that buttons are firmly attached, hems are securely sewn with matching thread, and that no pilling or stray threads are visible. Get soiled items to your dry cleaner and reclaim your wardrobe. Nothing says "careless" like neglected--or unworn--apparel.

4. Your wardrobe, only better. Have a professional adjust your garments so they appear custom made. Make sure sleeve lengths look like they were made for you (rather than someone three inches shorter than you!). Well-suited vertical proportions give your mirror image a noticeable nod of approval.



5. Shop strategically. The National Retail Federation (www.nrf.org) has a seasonal shopping guide on its Web site that details when seasonal merchandise is likely to go on sale and when to shop if you

are a hard-to-find-size. Mark your calendar and use the merchandise cycles to your advantage.

6. Be in the loop. Identify your favorite stores and sign-up for their e-newsletters and loyalty programs. These retailers will seek out their most passionate customers first for special sales and promotions. You'll likely receive coupons and be notified

when items go on sale. These insider tips and savings help you slip into the latest styles on a modest budget.

7. Re-mix existing garments. Combining last season's fashion wins with new companion pieces can expand your wardrobe budget. True recession chic is taking the skirt bought last fall and switching out the cashmere turtleneck for a new fine gauge cardigan layered over a lace-trimmed camisole. Men can give last summer's linen trousers a fresh look by combining with high-polish dress shoes – a very '09 way to wear linen, rather than the traditional pairing with casual shoes.

8. Redux the 'do! A new hairstyle is a small investment that delivers a significant impact. Your face and head are the focus of attention in any interaction with others. Even subtle style changes offer refreshing image updates within a compromised spending plan.

9. Give yourself a boost. One new, well-chosen item can liven up your visual presence without breaking the bank. What's new and fresh? This season, it's a "nude" color shoe, a 1960's pale lipstick, and neck scarves in place of ties for men.

10. Rejuvenate yourself. Rest is the cheapest makeover you can give yourself. A 2005 Survey by the National Sleep Foundation found that those who get a good night's rest never or rarely feel tired or not up to par. The survey called this group the Lively Larks and they are also less likely to have missed work or have made errors on the job.