

Re·ces·sion·ista \ ri-'sesh-ən-ēsta \ n.

1: Someone who wants to update her wardrobe without emptying her designer wallet, spends frugally and looks fabulous

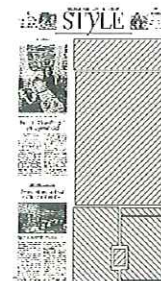
2: markdown maven 3: discount diva.

When the going gets tough, the tough get going — to consignment stores, vintage boutiques, department stores with lines of low-priced designer clothing and maybe even to the sewing machine.

The economic tumult of the past few weeks has hit the pocketbook hard, causing many to wonder whether they'll be able to add those must-have pieces to their fall wardrobes. Fear not, fashionistas: With a little ingenuity and discipline, you can become a recessionista. The word's origins may be uncertain, but in these uncertain times, it's a perfect fit.

It can even be an opportunity for a kind of spiritual, if not sartorial, growth. Anyone can look great by spending wads on ready-to-wear. It's a bigger challenge to be creative on a smaller budget. Remember women during World War II using eyebrow pencil to draw seams up the back of their legs to mimic nylons when they were in short supply?

One modern-day style secret from one of the city's better-dressed women: Focus on shoes and handbags, because people notice those first. Besides, a recent national online survey of 1,500 shoppers aged 18 to 70, with incomes between \$12,000 and \$100,000 a year, showed that 73 percent of respondents are more careful about how they spend today than they were a year ago. The survey, by WSL Strategic Retail, a marketing consulting firm in New York, indicated that a cultural shift away from conspicuous consumption may be under way — 56 percent of respondents consider it cool to save money and some 42 percent reported taking unnecessary items out of the basket at checkout.



How to economize? From H&M to Zara, there are plenty of places to find a basic little black dress for \$150 or less. Change your jacket and your bling and it'll see you through work and weekends.

If you're size 0 to 8, head to an indie fashion show like "Chillin' " (see www.chillinproductions.com for dates and locations) or traveling sample sale for discounted clothes and accessories (check www.billiondollarbabes.com). Target's success with the Isaac Mizrahi line has spawned new, limited-time partnerships with luxe vendors like handbag maker Botkier, whose hobos cost \$475 at Neiman Marcus but are less than \$40 at Target, and upscale jeweler Dean

Harris, whose nature-inspired rings with cognac diamonds go for up to \$39,000, but whose line at Target tops out at \$79.99.

You can make your own hair-care products and give yourself a facial at home with fruits and vegetables in the refrigerator. If you're really handy, you can even whip up your own handbags on that dusty Singer in your spare bedroom, with lessons, of course, from teachers at Stonemountain & Daughter Fabrics in Berkeley, where dozens of sewing classes are offered.

For the extremists among us, there's another option: Simply stay out of stores for the next year, or at least until the stock market goes up again.

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What are your best recession-ista ideas? Share your tips in the comments section of this story online at sfgate.com.

