# Fashion Outlook

### Shoppers love the clothes but hate the prices

I believe in love at first sight. Especially - perhaps only - when it comes to shopping for clothes. Let me tell you about my most recent love: a winter coat in a rich topaz wool, graced by a shawl collar and styled to wrap around without any bulk. When I saw this coat, my heartbeat grew faster and louder until each throb sounded like "made for me, made for me." The rapturous moment ended when I noticed that wrinkle of reality the price tag.

That coat would have cost more money than I've ever spent on a piece of apparel. It was more money than I allotted for my entire winter wardrobe. It was six times the cost of the winter coat I bought a few years ago. It was more than three times the amount I had set aside for this year's purchase. If I succumbed to desire and bought this coat, I'd pay as much as I do for three months rent.

Like any romantic, I began to rationalize. I put this object of desire to my price-per-wear test. Between November and March I'd probably wear this coat at least a hundred times, so it would be like paying about \$15 each time. Since it must be a warm coat, I could walk to work and knock off another \$2 per wear. OK, then I could cut out frivolous expenditures: no more fashlon magazines, Ben & Jer'ry's ice cream, movies, maybe even

skip the dentist.

If only I could believe that love is blind. That price tag was going to break up this love affair. Even after the traditional coat sale on Columbus Day, the object of my desire was too expensive. My heart, like my closet, was still open, but my wallet remained firmly shut.

Seems like my wallet has had the last word more than once this year. Whenever a saleslady asks if I need help, I have to restrain myself from responding, "Yes, financial help would be nice." Somewhere there is a woman who can buy all the clothes that I'd love to have, and I hate her. But I know that in this misery, I have plenty of company. Many people are dismayed by the high prices of clothes.

Consumers may have tightened their belts, but retail stores have felt the squeeze since retail sales have been "flat" for the past two years. While retailers and designers complain about the increased cost of labor and material, they also seem to be rethinking their whole approach. Discount stores like Marshall's and Daffy's are developing higher profiles. Designers are launching lowerpriced lines. Donna Karan's DKNY line turned out to be both a financial and fashion success. Jones New York



recently told Women's Wear Daily that besides trying to keep prices under \$300, the company was concentrating on separates because women seemed reluctant to buy ensembles.

Shoppers have become more shrewd about purchases. For me, shopping has become a game of wait and see. I may fall in love easily, but I'm not an impulse buyer. My strategy is more of a shopping expedition than shopping spree. I check out a lot of stores and compare prices. Recently I tracked down a blouse that was \$145 in a boutique, \$130 in one department store and \$18 less in the store across

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I'll balance out an expensive purchase by finding a basic at a good price, like \$19.50 for a Gap turtleneck. To avoid a buying binge, I won't bring credit cards with me. In fact, I pay cash whenever possible because it seems silly to pay 18 percent interest, even when I'm saving 20 or 40 percent on a sale.

"Sale" remains the magic word. It's easier to wait for sales now that stores show sweaters in July and swimsuits in March. By the time those pieces are wearable, the price has often dropped to a more bearable amount.

Part of the charm of having favorite clothes is that I don't mind wearing them often. I had to learn to be practical about shopping, but I still believe in happy endings, so maybe there is a winter coat out there meant for me.

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#### Documentary examines facets of human nature

(TC)—Reserve Wednesdays at 9:00 p.m., when TVO presents Human Edge, hosted by Michael Ignatieff, who will introduce recent hour-long documentaries that explore the many and varied facets of human nature.

La Ofrenda (the offering), November 1 (beginning at 9:20 because of the Membership campaign), is a quiet and lyrical meditation on death that contrasts North Americans' fear of death with traditional Mexican attitudes. Filmed in a small Mexican village and a Chicano community of San Francisco,

La Ofrenda captures the pageantry and ritual of the Days of the Dead, celebrated every year on October 31 and November 1 to honor death.

What Saturday Night Fever did for disco, In Heaven There Is No Beer? (November 8) does for the polka! Filmed during several polka marathons, Heaven captures the joy and enthusiasm of lovers of the dance in the midwest U.S. (beginning at 9:20 because of the Membership campaign).

One Generation More (November 15) focuses on one English-speaking. three-generation Jewish family

in Estonia that is celebrating its first Passover since the beginning of the Stalin era, and documents the contradictions inherent in glasnost.

The American journalist Charles Glass, who was kidnapped by Shiite gunmen on the road to Beirut in 1987, and escaped 62 days later, presents a personal impression of Lebanon in Pity the Nation: Charlie Glass's Lehanon (November

Vernon, Florida (November 29) is a fascinating, funny look at the eccentric underbelly of the U.S. through the eyes of ordinary (which is to say extraordinary) people of a small town in Washington County, Florida.

Edge -- a refreshing look at the art of documentary filmmaking today.



the street. I bought the blouse because

it met my criteria: it could be worn

for more than one season, it would go

well with career clothes or jeans, it

looked like it would outlast the cur-

rent trend and it went with at least

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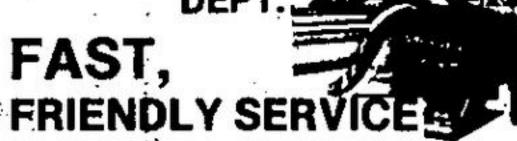
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