

A black silhouette of a woman in profile, facing left. She has her hair styled in a bun with three decorative swirls. She is wearing a dress that is filled with a pattern of red roses. The roses are scattered across the dress, with some petals appearing to trail off to the right. The entire graphic is set against a light beige background.

# LOOKING FLY ON A DIME

How to Find Fabulous Fashion  
at Any **Thrift Shop** & Make the  
**Cheap Look Chic**

**PATRICE J. WILLIAMS**

Looking Fly on a Dime: How to Find Fabulous Fashion at Any Thrift Shop and Make the Cheap Look Chic

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# Introduction

My name is Patrice and I'm a thriftaholic. This is where you chime in and say, "Hi Patrice" and make me feel at ease over my addiction. Well, I don't really want any rehab for my thrift dependency.

A thrift store is defined by Merriam-Webster as "a shop that sells secondhand articles and especially clothes and is often run for charitable purposes."

I want to update that to define the act of thrifting as the most awesome, economical, eco-friendly way to obtain the look of high style on a shoestring budget.

With more than 70 percent of my wardrobe consisting of thrift store scores, it's safe to say I'm a serious thrift shopper. And why wouldn't I be? I've found one-of-a-kind dresses, designer labels like Gucci, Balenciaga and Chanel and have styled entire outfits for less than \$10. I even gave up buying new clothes for a year, as a part of the [Thrifty Threads 365](#) challenge I created.

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I love thrift shopping for fun, but I initially started thrifting out of necessity.

My mom says I always loved the Salvation Army as a kid, but the first recollection I have of thrifting was when I needed an outfit for an induction ceremony while a sophomore in college {shout out to my Temple University alums!}.

A local secondhand shop was near a fast food joint and I dipped in there after devouring a value meal. This thrift store was huge. Though I was mildly overwhelmed, a sense of calm overcame me when I realized all of the clothes were neatly organized and the prices were perfect for my work study budget. After

just 30 minutes, I walked out of the store with a button down top and suede pencil skirt. My outfit was a hit and no one knew the pieces once belonged to someone else. After that, I was hooked.

I continued to thrift throughout my undergrad years, and thrifting once again became a necessity when I moved to New York and began working at a top fashion magazine. Though my place of employment was glamorous, the \$27,000 salary was gasp-worthy. Since I'm not a trust-fund baby, all of my money went to living expenses, matching my employer's 401k contributions and the occasional happy hour. In an attempt to at least look like I worked in the world of fashion, thrift shopping once again became my primary source of retail. While I wrote about haute couture and red carpet looks by day, my own style was being cultivated at national thrift chains and small shops throughout the city.

Fast forward years later and I have thrifted from New York to Los Angeles, rarely buy new clothes and even started a blog, [Looking Fly on a Dime](#), that heavily focuses on the art of thrift. I've even landed on national television due to my passion for sourcing stellar secondhand scores. While on "The Nate Berkus Show," Nate called me a "sorceress" at recreating the look of designer styles using finds from Goodwill and the Salvation Army. Ok, I'm done name dropping.

Once I started blogging in 2009, I realized there was an entire community of thrifters. These are the people who understand today's thrift shops aren't dimly lit, mothball smelling, granny clothes warehouses. Stores are now offering the best of the best and at a price anyone can afford.

There was once a time when people would be ashamed to say they bought clothes secondhand, but that's totally not the case anymore. Thrifting is so suddenly chic that I even wrote a piece for [The New York Times](#) on how secondhand shops are offering department store options, like loyalty cards and VIP discounts.

Besides the affordability, people thrift for the variety of options. Fast fashion stores serve the masses budget friendly pieces, but for the person who wants something a little different and one-of-a-kind, thrifting is the way to go. Also, since fashion is so cyclical, what used to be hot decades ago is on trend again, only this time you don't have to pay a fortune for it.

From hipsters in the latest "it" part of town to vintage-loving professionals looking to upgrade their wardrobe and college students just trying to develop a sense of style

on a work study budget, thrift shopping has become a go-to chic option for any and everyone.

Though thrifting can pretty much include any form of obtaining secondhand goods {eBay, Craigslist, or online clothing swaps}, this book will solely be about thrift shopping at brick and mortar stores, which is where I find most people run into major issues.

While people are often impressed by the thrifted items I find, they tend to look at thrift shopping as something that's intriguing but impossible if you're new to it.

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---

*I don't live in a big city so I would never be able to thrift shop.*

*How do you always find such great stuff?*

*You're petite so that's why you always find stuff.*

*Isn't wearing someone else's clothes dirty?*

I've heard all of the above questions and statements before.

I don't care where you live, how you define your style, what size you are, how tall or short you are or what income bracket you're in, if you're really interested in thrift shopping, I've got you covered with the best ways to become a rock star thrifter. Shoppers of all sizes donate their threads, so there's something for everyone.

While I could just give you tips on what to do once you're in the store, this guide walks you through what to do before you shop, strategies while you're shopping and how to sanitize and style your clothes once you bring them home.

From beginning to end, here are the tips I've used over the years to help me find wardrobe basics and designer finds. You'll feel more confident when you step in the stores and pick up necessary styling tips to make the cheap look like a million bucks.



## Preparing for Your Visit



Preparation is key. Here's what to know {and do!} before you visit any thrift store. It's easy to go thrifting on a whim, but a little pre-game strategy can make a huge difference.

Walking in to a thrift store with a plan is a must. I hate to assert that anything is a must, but this is an exception. Even someone like myself who's been thrifting since forever has to have a focus and plan of action. Luckily, this prep isn't too time consuming. Just think of it this way: any time you spend preparing in advance is time you can save while actually in the store. Trust me, these handy tips will alleviate massive frustration and help you walk away with super savings on stylish gear. Just ask yourself a few questions or take the following tips in to consideration before you venture into the wide wonderful world of thrift shopping.

# Store Selection

If there's a single question I hear more than anything it's, "Patrice, how do I find a thrift store?" Most people assume a great thrifting trip is solely determined by going to the best thrift store. Of course your thrift store scores are only as good as the store you visit, but this isn't the only factor.

For now, let's get back to the immediate question: how do I even *find* a shop?

One site I always direct people to is [The Thrift Shopper](#). This national directory lets you enter your zip code for shops in your area. With 11,000 stores {and counting!} listed, you'll find shops near you as well as info on hours, websites, and everything else you need to get started. There's even a forum to connect with fellow thrift lovers.

The Thrift Shopper, a national thrift store directory; just enter your zip code!

An obvious, but often overlooked solution is to check with major chains in your area. Goodwill, Salvation Army, Savers, Value Village, among others, all have shops located across the states. Heading to their respective sites will display what's closest to you.

It takes a little time and trial and error to find what's best for you. The best shop depends on your preferences, level of skill and of course, budget.

I know some thrifters who love the feel of independent shops and heading to less populated towns. There tends to be a smaller crowd to compete with, and since they're not one of the mega chains there is a hidden treasure feel to them. You might also find more wiggle room to negotiate prices. A mom and pop shop will be more willing to give you a deal as opposed to a national chain where the workers have limited, if any, control over prices. Also, smaller cities typically have lower prices than a big city like New York or Los Angeles. I've had some people tell me that I find great items because I'm based in NYC and that smaller cities don't have as much to offer. That couldn't be farther from true! Sure, city dwellers have more access to shops, but don't overlook the smaller shops and cities. While in a small town in Ohio, I found a few vintage garments for less than \$10. So don't write off thrifting just because you're not in one of the bigger cities.

Think smaller cities have no thrift store options? Think again.

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You might also strike gold at shops that are in the quiet suburbs of a major city. Professionals who work in the city tend to live in the suburbs, and where are they donating their designer, professional gear? That’s right, to the suburban shops in their hometowns.

For those new to the thrift experience, I always suggest starting off with stores that are organized and have clothes hanging on the racks instead of warehouse or bag sales where clothes are loaded in bins. Warehouse locations can be super overwhelming, so you want to ease your way in to those, whereas a shop with clothes organized by style will make your experience more manageable.

Don’t forget to take your budget into consideration {we’ll discuss this in greater detail later} when determining where you

want to shop. While some stores may charge \$30 for a basic, non-designer dress {which in my opinion is ridiculous} others are just a few bucks per piece. Not all thrift stores are created equal when it comes to price. Make sure the shop you’re hitting up is in line with your specific budget and what you define as affordable.

## When to Go

Awesome, you’re one step closer! You found a few shops that might be right for you, but one of the ways to save even more or better your odds of scoring is deciding when to go shopping. You never know what the inventory will be like, but particular days, or even a season can yield better results.

The best day/days to shop can vary by stores but in general, I avoid weekends if possible. Besides the additional crowds, the new items haven’t always hit the floor just yet. Most people tend to drop off donations on the weekend, but these “new” threads

aren't necessarily ready for purchase. Early on in the week {Monday, Tuesday or even Wednesday} can work out pretty well. By this time, the newer pieces have been sorted, tagged and are ready for sale. There's no guarantee the "new" stuff is stellar, but this definitely gives you a greater variety to choose from.

Other days you should take into consideration are sales. Yes, thrift stores have sales. You knew that, right? Ok, maybe you didn't, so here's the dish.

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While the prices are already affordable at secondhand shops, you can get savings on top of savings on sale days. They vary by store, but you can receive 25 percent off certain garments, half off select color tags, or buy one, get one free. I pretty much limit my trips to the Salvation Army to Wednesdays because that's Family Day, when most of the clothes and shoes are half off. While some shops have the same sales each week, others switch it up. I always follow my favorite stores on social media, either Facebook or Twitter, for updates on the day's sales. I happened to check Goodwill's Twitter feed one Sunday afternoon and read about a denim blowout sale.

If one of your stores isn't on social media, inquire about a newsletter so you can stay in the loop and even get on their customer VIP list.

In addition to the day to go, take into account what season you're shopping in.

The end and beginning of a year is prime time for donations. More people are getting rid of last minute donations before the calendar year closes so they can count it as a charitable donation on their taxes. This means the boxes and

Change in season= surge in donations.

bags of goods people have been hoarding throughout the year are finally reaching the thrift shop. As people receive new items, especially electronics, for the holidays, they donate their old to make room for the new.

Another thrift prime time is found in the seasons between late winter and early spring. When the temps are increasing for most people around the country means closets are getting a mini makeover.

After a harsh winter, people tend to get rid of heavy sweaters, knit pants or any coats they're absolutely tired of. While some department stores have already cleared out their winter outerwear in February or March, you can still find a few at thrift stores.

Summer is a huge moving season, and moving can be very stressful. That stressful time for others is your retail gain! Instead of schlepping old, but potentially amazing pieces to another home, many people choose to donate. A new home may mean a new television, bed and/or bed frame, couch or dishes, and the old goes to the nearest thrift store or even Craigslist {there's an awesome free section worth checking out.}. This isn't just limited to home decor and electronics. Instead of packing and unloading those clothes they're not going to wear anyway, it's easier to once again drop off at a location or one of those convenient donation bins.

The actual time of day you go should really depend on the time that you can commit to at least an hour of shopping. For some people that's the morning, and for others it might be the evening. Personally, I love a great afternoon thrift trip early in the week. Earlier in the morning or afternoon is when stores have either just put out new items or they're adding pieces throughout the day. I know quite a few shops that replenish and turn over inventory two to three times in a day. If it's too late in the afternoon or near closing time, they're putting stuff away versus putting them out for shoppers.

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Follow  
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on social media  
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