

Money Well Spent:

Salvage Clothes and Save

With the economy still unstable, tossing your closet's **USED AND ABUSED** may not be the savviest decision.

By Dana Schuster

It used to be easier to be flippant about stains. Red wine, oil, blood, grass, whatever. If your dry-cleaner couldn't fix it—or further ruined it in the process, as is all too often sadly the case—you'd toss it out, donate it to charity, consider it part of an involuntary closet purge. No big deal. There was always a new blouse or cocktail dress around the corner.

Even for a woman's most cherished items, the cycle of life and death is inevitable when it comes to clothing. Certainly, some ladies abide by the "it's so beautiful, I don't want to wear it" adage, but with pocket books all the more lean in today's economic climate, most women are following a different mantra: if you've got it, wear it.

That means that instead of shelling out big bucks to replace a soiled jacket or a torn chiffon gown, women are spending their money on cleaning, restoring, and tailoring. "They're not discarding these pieces like they used to... now women are taking care of these things more often... they're being more conscious of the environment and the economics," explained John Mahdessian, President of Madame Paulette, a famed New York City-based couture cleaner (shame on the sap who calls it a dry-cleaner) that caters to a worldwide clientele and has plans to eventually open in Los Angeles and Dubai, among other fashion-centric cities.

Madame Paulette was opened 50 years ago by Mahdessian's great uncle after he emigrated from Cyprus. He named the shop after a French woman with whom he fell in love and later married. John Mahdessian eventually left his career in investment banking (a serendipitous

move, perhaps?) to help his father who had taken over the business. The shop's global beginnings remain intact today. "I would probably say that 20 to 25 percent of our clients ship from outside NYC," explained Mahdessian, adding that his clients include everyone from Faith Hill and Norma Kamali to Vera Wang and Melania Trump (the latter of whom he assisted down to the last minute at her extravagant nuptials to Donald Trump as guest cum tailor). "I remember a long time ago, Norma Kamali was at a café on Madison Avenue and she called and said, 'Oh my God, I just spilled an entire decanter of red wine!' I showed up in the middle of the afternoon during lunch, I did my magic and removed the entire stain, got a standing ovation and left," Mahdessian laughs with the chuckle of a fondly remembered, and often told, anecdote.

Although the economic climate has resulted in a dip in Madame Paulette's "maintenance" servicing, Mahdessian says that business has actually gone up in other arenas, particularly with customers' more expensive pieces.

Celebrity stylist, Rachel Zoe, isn't surprised. "I think that people are revisiting things that they maybe were sick of a few seasons ago and probably closet-cleaning and pulling out pieces that they once loved but haven't worn in a while and getting them tailored more closely to their bodies," explained Zoe.

Certainly, tailoring and high-quality cleaning doesn't come cheap. "I look at clothes... some of them are pieces of art. And how much do you spend to protect a piece of art? If you're going to spend thousands on a clothing item or furniture or anything that is valuable, maintaining it is part of the process," said television impresario/model Hofit Golan, an avid MP customer after Mahdessian himself saved Golan at Denise Rich's Angel Ball a few years back when a reveler knocked over a four-foot centerpiece vase and its entire aquatic con-



John Mahdessian and Melania on the day of her wedding to Donald Trump.



Hofit Golan wearing the saved gown in an Elizabeth Grant ad.

Talking Point

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tents crashed all over her couture crimson gown that she was slated to wear for a photo shoot a mere three days later.

“My husband sees the bills and sometimes says, ‘Oh my gosh. I can’t believe it!’” exclaimed Pamela DeVos, President and Owner of Pamella Roland, of her dry-cleaning costs, though she’s noticed that he’s

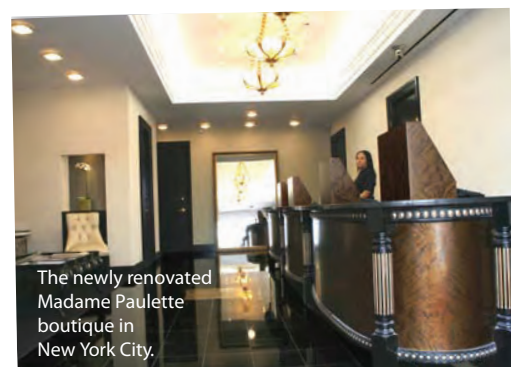
“HOW MUCH DO YOU SPEND TO PROTECT A PIECE OF ART?”

started to throw some of his higher-end items in with her “to clean” shipments from her home-base in Michigan.

The monthly bills might seem to defy recession-logics in the heat of the garment-pressing moment. But restoring or saving a favorite outfit is almost always a less expensive option than dashing to Bergdorf’s for a replacement. That is, as long as you abide by Zoe’s mandate that, “alterations and dry cleaning should never be more than the actual item.”

Of course, keeping your clothes in tip-top condition before a tipsy colleague is able to splash you down with that night’s Bordeaux is key to an outfit’s longevity. Zoe likes to keep anything with embellishment or made of fragile material such as chiffon or silk jersey in a plastic garment bag to avoid dress-to-dress snagging. She also swears by thin, black velvet hangers and keeps her scarves stacked in big Hermes boxes. “It’s nice to look at rather than sweater piles,” she

Stylist Rachel Zoe swears by black velvet hangers.



The newly renovated Madame Paulette boutique in New York City.



Pamella Roland designer, Pamela DeVos.

explained of her Hermes storage system.

Lisa Anastos, arts patron, keeps Madame Paulette’s on-the-go stain removal kit nearby. “I have one in my apartment and one is in my travel bag. It’s part of my toiletries,” Anastos said.

Melania Trump’s advice? “Always take care of your belongings, and store them in the right places. Keep shoes either in their boxes or on shelves and keep handbags stuffed with something to ensure that they keep their shape.”

And when fate isn’t on your side, it’s important to act quickly the next time your Salvatore gets soiled. “Time is a very critical factor in stain removal,” Mahdessian warned. “The longer you let a stain sit in a garment or on a textile, the harder it is to remove because it becomes oxidized.”

Ah, the science of salvaging! As if women needed another reason to chase the clock. ■