



HOW TO FIND A BARGAIN



The best reductions come to she who plans, bides her time and minds her manners, says the expert shopper **ANDREW MELLON**

CHARM OFFENSIVE Be nice! The most overlooked bargain-hunting weapon is politeness. Being pleasant to shop staff is easily the most effective way to find out when things will be coming down in price and what's waiting in the stockroom

LOOK FURTHER AFIELD The serious bargain-hunter should seek out the independent outlet stores or mill shops for each brand. Burberry has great sites in Northumberland and West Yorkshire, for example. Many are located on industrial estates or off the beaten track. Big brands aren't always keen to advertise the fact that their stock is available at cut-price, so invest in a good brand directory, or get in touch with customer services to find where they are

VILLAGE PEOPLE A more family-friendly alternative is to head for an outlet shopping village such as York Designer Outlet or Cheshire Oaks, where less hardy shoppers can recuperate in one of the many cafés and restaurants. Bicester Village in Oxfordshire still reigns supreme, with many designers having their one and only outlet there. But be warned – most outlets will only offer a credit note or item exchange, rather than a full refund

ASK THE EXPERTS For smaller, quirkier brands, try sample sales. Sign up to designers' mailing lists for updates on forthcoming events, or seek out a private sale company – designerwarehouse.com is particularly good. If the thought of a warehouse scrum fills you with dread, try secretsales.com, which runs regular 48-hour sales where you can buy online

BE PATIENT Go with an open mind, rather than a set of rigid specifics. Be aware that designer stock is held back for up to a year before being sent into the outlet stores, in order to protect the brand image. So if it's a particular product you are after, it may pay to bide your time

KNOW YOUR ROUTE Harrods is still the king of sales because it doesn't sit on stock – if it has to reduce something by 90 per cent to shift it, then it will. And this is where the bargains are to be found. Plan a route of the departments you want to visit and steel yourself. It's also worth revisiting throughout the sale for returned goods and further reductions

HAVE A STRATEGY Stay focused. Large discount stores such as TK Maxx can be daunting, but there are fantastic bargains to be found, provided you are disciplined. Allow yourself at least an hour, and run your fingers along the racks – it's the fastest way of picking out the odd bit of cashmere from the rows of polyester. Gather up anything that catches your eye as you go along and edit your choices later. If you walk away to think about it, I guarantee it will be gone on your return ●

'How to Shop: The Sales and Bargain Guide for the Serious Shopper', by Andrew Mellon, is available from howtoshop.co.uk at £14.95