



Susan Komivies of Birmingham time travels back to the 1960s with a black silk chiffon dress (\$85) and black dotted Swiss net coat (\$125) from It Was, It Is in Birmingham, which supplied all the fashions seen on this page.

Photos by CAMILLE MCCOY/Staff photographer

Timeless threads

Old fashions have modern appeal

Komivies dons another, very different '80s look: a wool jersey pink and charcoal mini dress (\$25), metallic faux ostrich coat (\$45) and authentic go-go boots (\$20).



'I think of it as an alternative to the fashion of the day. This gives you a lot of choice.'

— Jackie Sheppard
Jackie's Vintage Fashions



These '60s rhinestone earrings retail for \$75 at It Was, It Is.

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

There is no classification in the Yellow Pages for vintage clothing. Newcomers in the hunt for the intricately detailed silks, velvets, satins and cashmeres of yesteryear are on their own.

The term vintage refers to clothing, jewelry or accessories from the Victorian era through the '60s.

These items can be seen once in a while in a flea market, once in a while in an antique shop, once in a while during resale-shop rummaging.

One resale shop saleswoman suggested the Salvation Army. The shops operated by the Salvation Army do not separate the older fashions from the newer.

Another saleswoman suggested the Presbyterian Thrift Shop in Plymouth's Old Village. That shop is only open Thursdays. Frustrating.

But once you've made your hit in the hunt, you have entered a rather delightful sort of underground movement. Everybody in the trade knows everybody else in the trade. What's more, they are happy to talk about it and welcome you into the world of alternative fashion.

A COLLECTIVE guess by vintage clothing dealers is that there are about 20 such dealers in the Detroit area, at least 10 of them in Royal Oak.

The joke in the trade is that nothing is ever sold. Pieces just change hands, again and again and again and again.

They can do that because the beaded chiffon is never worn by one person often enough to be worn out. They can do that because the padded shoulders and the peplum jacket purchased today for one short stay will surely be back in style some day.

"These clothes have character," said Linda Bliski, who manages Bargain Boutique in Dearborn. "These clothes are an art form,"

said Susan Scherer who owns and operates It Was, It Is in Birmingham.

"These clothes are going to withstand," said Mary Abess, who manages Patti Smith Collectibles in downtown Royal Oak.

"I've got some rhinestone and sequined things in here that you'd believe it if I told you they came from Chudik's," said Jackie Sheppard, who owns Jackie's Vintage Fashions in Troy Corners.

"And Michigan is still a bargain. The New Yorkers caught onto this a long time ago, and they do have a classified listing in the Yellow Pages," said Elizabeth Thorau, a private collector in Rochester who stages historical fashion shows and has outfitted guests for historical balls.

Scherer said she's had customers coming to her lately who were looking for clothes to wear for Murder Mystery Weekends. Abess said she thought she'd dressed at least 100 guests when Wabek Country Club hosted a '50s party. Several dealers mentioned being on the lookout for customers who wanted to dress to match their antique car. And they all get calls from community theater groups and those seeking outfits for Halloween or costume parties.

BUT THEIR MAINSTAY clients are looking for everyday clothes.

"This is not arty, not Bohemian, not weird," Scherer said.

"I think of it as an alternative to the fashion of the day. This gives you a lot of choice," Sheppard said.

"All of them are good for mix and match."

The dealers are tight-lipped about where they get their clothing. Some stated flatly that where they got their merchandise was a secret or were evasive about it.

Some mentioned rummaging through the garage sales and flea markets. Sheppard said she was always on the lookout for estate sales.

Bliski's Bargain Boutique, a shop operated by League of Catholic Women,

is stocked only by donations, so her vintage racks are filled with only what comes in, what she recognizes as good vintage and sets aside.

"The lines are always beautiful. I like to wear it myself. I know I don't have to do it in a shop like this. But there is enough call for it to make it worth my while for the league," Bliski said.

THE DEALERS could cry a river when they hear about the old clothes discarded after a death.

Scherer called it the "my-aunt-the-saver" phone call.

The phone call begins with the announcement that a relative died. The relative — my-aunt-the-saver — kept everything. The caller has maybe some jewelry, maybe some furniture to sell, but all those old clothes were put out in the trash.

But that's the value of vintage clothing — the materials are nearly impossible to replicate. The apparel has become a unique style of dress.

"There are no elastic waists here," Scherer said. "There are zippers, darts, hooks, gored, built-in stays, lining that is meant to last, they fit. And most of them have union-made. 'Made in the USA' labels."

THE CLOTHES are priced lower than fashions of today. They are not cheap, but there are bargains.

One staffer in Patti Smith's can spend full days looking for the moth holes, the dry rot, the stains or the ripped seams before the item is dry-cleaned and pressed and put up for sale. And all items, because each is one of a kind, are always individually priced.

"You can tell if you're with a good dealer because the garment with one button missing, or one small tear, will always be marked accordingly," Sheppard said.

"This is not a hobby," Scherer said. "This is for both men and women who just don't want to look like everybody else. They want to make their own style."

With the contrasting mix of a motorcycle leather jacket (\$100) and a wool knit (\$15), Komivies seems to be up for a role in "Hell's Angels at a Girls' Dormitory."

Newsletter tells where to find them

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

Something new in the world of vintage clothes is Antique Expressions. The third issue of this bimonthly newsletter was distributed last month. It can be had for a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

"There are always so many where-did-you-get-it and where-can-I-find-it questions a newsletter seemed to be the answer. It was necessary to fill a need," said editor Nancy Pacitto, who now has 300 on her mailing list.

Antique Expressions is put together for those with a true appreciation and a sincere interest in vintage clothing, said Pacitto, a Detroit resident.

It lists historical fashion shows coming up and gives mini-critiques on historical clothing shows or displays she has seen. The newsletter tells about what the old car clubs or the Detroit Area Art Deco Society is

doing or planning. It tells where you can find old patterns, old fashion books, or military uniforms and has one listing under the heading "Great Places to Shop."

If you can't find what you're looking for in a shop, Pacitto suggests having it made by Patterns & Clothing Reproductions. (Call Judy Mulen, 435-8608.)

Along with the announcements, Pacitto writes one or two features for every issue of Antique Expressions. One was called "By the Sea . . . By the Sea," chronicling swim wear from the 1800s. Other articles included "In a Military Fashion" and "The Gay Nineties."

Shorter pieces showcased one collector, one dealer, or one shop.

PACITTO WEARS clothes from the '30s and '40s for everyday wear now while she is working toward her degree in fashion history.

Her love of vintage clothing began when she bought a suit by Adrian,

the celebrated costume designer for MGM who dressed the studio's stars from 1928 through 1942.

Among those stars was Joan Crawford. Her trademark was a wide-shouldered, narrow-hipped silhouette, a trademark that also became the mark of Adrian.

"Every time I wear that suit I feel part of the Hollywood era of glamour and magic," Pacitto said.

Since buying that suit, Pacitto has acquired a wearable collection of fashions from 1910-1980, more than 500 fashion illustrations, patterns, magazines and dressmaking books. Some of the collection dates back to 1880.

"I write (in Antique Expressions) just what I hear about — just to pass along what I hear to all who have a passion for old clothes," she said.

For a copy of the November-December issue of the newsletter, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Antique Expressions, Nancy Pacitto, 10921 Worden, Detroit 48224.

