

TRAVEL

Europe beckons bargain shoppers to couture bazaars

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
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"I hate Paris!" Nicole Christ said emphatically with a laugh. "They're so mean."

But Paris is the home of Chanel, Dior, Givenchy, St. Laurent and other name designers. And when the fashion shows are over, the dresses go to resale shops.

That's something Christ knows all about as owner of Nicole's Revival, a designer resale store at 958 N. Newburgh, Westland. Christ and Carolyn Schneider, author of "The Ultimate Consignment and Thrift Store Guide," are leading a European Resale Tour to London and Paris, Sept. 30 to Oct. 7.

Christ, 28, has been leading local resale bus tours of the Detroit-metro area since 1994. Four or five Saturdays a year, a group of about 50 people gather at Nicole's Revival, share a continental breakfast and then take a bus that stops at local resale shops. The \$35 tour runs from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Carolyn Schneider liked the

idea so much she suggested they might expand their horizons.

"She said let's go to Europe," Christ said. "We went last March and interviewed stores. The only ones that were rude were the ones in Paris. The Paris stores are real expensive, pricey."

But they have things that we don't have here. Madame Nicole, who has several stores, has one that's all Chaneles. I'm lucky if I got one Chanel, but this whole store was full of them."

Not every store in London and Paris was acceptable.

"We saw 10 stores in London. Five were no's, three maybes and two definites," Christ said. "We've had stores calling but we needed details. We have to be selective on a trip like this. We can't show them hillbilly thrift shops."

And the two cities definitely have their own unique styles.

"In London, I noticed a lot of the shops had more, um, mohawks, anarchy, vintage sort of things. In Paris there is more couture, more art. London is more ...," Christ said ending by imitating a Jimmy Page guitar riff.

Christ, who lives in Garden City, is not a big fan of Europe. She first visited London six years ago. Her ex-husband was from England and they honeymooned in France.

But nothing stops a shopper in pursuit of a bargain, which has been Christ's life work for the last six years.

"I was going into real estate, I went to school and got my real estate license and studied building and was going to combine them, but then I decided to open this store six years ago," she said.

Her brother had noticed that Crowley's was closing a store and throwing racks of clothing in a dumpster. That was the beginning of Christ's quest for slightly used clothing. A quick check on buying habits told her Westland ranked just behind Grand Rapids and Troy as a retail center.

Each week Christ visits the homes of the wealthy and locally famous to buy their designer suits, dresses and accessories. She also picks up clothes worn by auto show models, stores that go out of business and designers.

"We buy outright, no consignments," she said.

And her customers include a broad range of incomes.

"We have people who could buy and sell this place a million times over but like the thrill of the hunt," she said.

But not everything in Nicole's Revival is high-end designer wear. She also has clothes originally from the Gap, J. Crew and Eddie Bauer.

But for men, she has only high-end items. She said men want to take the time to shop around and search for items. They have a definite idea of what they want.

That was one of the attractions of Madame Nicole's in Paris.

"She owns a men's resale shop that was the best I've seen with Versace, Armani," she said.

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Celebrities: Carolyn Schneider (left) and Nicole Christ caught the attention of Paris television on their last visit.

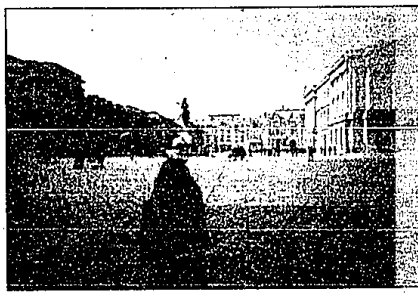
Schneider's book, "The Ultimate Consignment & Thrift Store Guide," is a listing of hundreds of stores around the world. She has been in charge of contacting the stores while Christ has created an itinerary working with Four Corner Travel in Birmingham.

The group will be flying a United Airlines 777.

In addition to intensive bargain hunting at resale shops and some flea markets, the trip will include some of the more usual travel opportunities: trips by boat on the Thames and Seine, a Buckingham Palace tour, a Ritz Escoffier cooking demonstration in Paris, a fashion show and free time to explore.

"On Sunday in London we are going to Westminster Abbey to their 3:15 p.m. service. I guess their service is awesome! They have young boys 8-10 singing and it's like angels singing," she said.

"This trip is tentatively priced at \$1,165 per person which includes roundtrip air, flight



Royal accommodations: Nicole Christ isn't a fan of Paris, but she said Versailles was impressive.

between London and Paris, accommodations, fashion show, resale shop tour, bus tours for both cities and a discount at Printemps Department Store in

Paris. Other items are optional. For travel information, call Four Corners Travel at 1-800-373-0853 or Nicole's Revival at 1-734-729-1234.

GREAT ESCAPES

Great Escapes features various travel news items. Send news leads, story ideas or your own travel adventures to Hugh Gallagher, assistant managing editor for features, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36351 Schoolcraft, Livonia, 48160 or fax to (734)591-7279 or e-mail to hgallagher@oe.hometown.com

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NEW AT CEDAR POINT

The new entertainment at Cedar Point Amusement Park in Sandusky, Ohio, will include a high dive act, a new IMAX movie and a party band.

"Splash" will be a high diving demonstration in the Cedar Point Aquatic Stadium featuring eight Olympic caliber divers in a 20-minute display of diving talent.

The new IMAX offering is "Extreme." The 1999 IMAX movie combines incredible extreme sport action with narration from the athletes and a contemporary soundtrack. Sports include skiing and snowboarding, mountain climbing, surfing and windsurfing.

"Jump, Jive & Jam!" will feature a high-energy party band as a prelude to "Cedar Point Summer Spectacular" laser, light and

sound extravaganza. "Jump, Jive & Jam" will feature kick off the summer party on June 26 and run through Aug. 22. Cedar Point opens Sunday, May 9.

BERKSHIRES IN SUMMER

The Berkshire Hills of Western Massachusetts will celebrate summer 1999 with dozens of world premieres among hundreds of music, theater and dance performances, including two world premieres based on the novel "Summer" by Edith Wharton, which is set in a rural Berkshire village. The stars of stage and screen will be evident in the area including Academy Award-winning actress Gwyneth Paltrow's appearance at the Williamstown Theatre Festival as Rose in "As You Like It," scheduled Aug. 14-15.

On Aug. 28, the Berkshire Opera Company will premiere

the operatic version of Wharton's "Summer" Aug. 31, Sept. 2 and 4 at the Koussevitzky Arts Center on the Berkshire Community College Campus in Pittsfield.

This year the Boston Symphony Orchestra will honor Seiji Ozawa's 25th anniversary as music director at Tanglewood. The BSO will begin its season July 9 with Ozawa conducting Beethoven's 6th and 7th symphonies. Tanglewood will also feature noted classical soloists, jazz and popular music.

The area also features dance, drama, choral and operatic performances at various venues.

For more information on the Berkshires, a free guide book, a free Culture in the County Brochure, map and calendar of events, visitors may contact the Berkshire Visitors Bureau at (1-800)237-5747. Visitors may

also write the Berkshire Visitors Bureau, Berkshire Common, Pittsfield, MA 01201 or visit the Web site at www.berkshires.org

KAYAKING

REI is holding a Kayak Demo Day 1-3 p.m. Sunday, May 2, at Gallup Park in Ann Arbor, take the Geddes Road exit off US-23 west to Huron Drive. This clinic is an on the water event co-hosted by Walden Kayaks. This is a chance to try a kayak, learn paddling techniques, water safety and your options with kayak accessories. Open to beginners and skilled kayakers. All clinics are free and open to the public.

BEER BASH

The fourth annual World Expo of Beer will be held Friday-Saturday, May 14-15, in Frankenmuth, Mich. More than 2,000 beer lovers "tapped into" last

year's expo.

The Budweiser Beer School is back. Each classroom is comprised of two 63-foot long trailers that unfold and join together to make a 1,400-square-foot classroom that seats 48 people. To participate in the class, call Linda Nichols at (617)652-6106 or 1-800-FUN FEST.

Tickets to the World Expo purchased prior to May 4 receive an official World Expo of Beer 1999 glass mug. Each ticket includes 10 "samples." Ticket price is \$10 and can be ordered by calling toll free, 1-800-FUN FEST. The Expo will run 6-10 p.m. Friday and 2-10 p.m. Saturday.

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