

Dress circle

What goes around, comes around – no wonder quality workmanship and elegant femininity are back in style and driving a retro revival. By **Joanna Bounds** and **Angie Kelly**.

Sydney women are falling in love with vintage clothes. We're succumbing to the feeling of silk against the skin, the feminine curve of flowing gowns and the old-world glamour of elbow-length gloves. Our crush on everything old means we are bagging original 1950s dresses from boutiques dedicated to hunting them down from here and overseas, we're buying beaded cardies at clothing fairs devoted to the genre and when we can't find originals we're having copies made with the fine tailoring of a bygone era.

Those at the forefront say our love affair can be explained partly by nostalgia for a simpler time when women dressed up in velvet, taffeta and satin instead of skinny jeans, as well as the interwoven desire for a return to femininity – to step back briefly into an era when it was usual to set your hair, put on a hat and apply letterbox-red lippe every time you walked out the front door.

Feeding this growing desire is Coco Repose boutique in Surry Hills – a treasure trove of hat boxes, diamante brooches, full skirts and beaded cashmere. Using a dedicated band of vintage fashion scouts in the US, most of the Coco Repose stock is genuine vintage – that is, 25 years old or more. And when there are home-grown discoveries – sometimes in a too-fragile-to-be-sold condition – local tailors will lovingly hand-make copies using vintage fabric, turning out just one garment in each size.

Store owner Jessica Guthrie says one reason for a recent spike in the current craze is from women who want to replicate the look from '50s- and '60s-set television shows such as *Mad Men* (which finished last week on SBS) and hit Hollywood movies.

"When Angelina Jolie appeared in *Changeling*, cloche hats suddenly became big for winter," says Guthrie. "Then girls started coming in and asking for tight 'wiggle' dresses that they'd seen on the TV series *Mad Men*, so they can wear them at 'wiggle parties'. It's also a result of a generation of girls growing up watching [high fashion] shows like *Sex And The City*."

She adds that another popular reason why women buy vintage outfits is to wear them to the office.

"It's about people wanting a different look for work. It's not crazy costuming – just really nice 1940s and '50s suits with great detailing and beautiful tailoring."

Lorraine Foster, who helped found The Vintage Clothing Shop in Sydney's CBD more than three decades ago, says the increasing number of style-led television shows and films means customers often come through her door wanting to find out more.

Top stores and websites

Coco Repose
82 Fitzroy Street, Surry Hills; 9356 4804.

Grandma Takes a Trip
263 Crown Street, Surry Hills; 9356 3322.
79 Gould Street, Bondi Beach; 9130 6262.

The Vintage Clothing Shop
Shop 7, St James Arcade,
80 Castlereagh Street,
Sydney; 9238 0090.

Love Vintage
lovevintage.com.au.

Sydney Antique Centre
531 South Dowling Street, Surry Hills;
9361 3244.

Cath Kidston
cathkidston.co.uk.

Lark & Friends
larkmade.com.au.

Venus in Furs
Bespoke vintage-inspired evening wear and millinery by appointment, 63 Kingston Road, Camperdown; 8021 6794 or 0410 660 912; venusinfurs@optusnet.com.au.



Vintage jewellery like this typekey bracelet made from old-fashion typewriters will be available at the next Magnolia Square shopping event at Randwick Racecourse in November. See typekey.com.au.

fabrics and sizes are often different with vintage garments."

Nicola Sault, the British-born owner of Surry Hills Crown Street store *Grandma Takes a Trip*, advises starting out by wearing a vintage dress with a pair of contemporary shoes, or a retro cardigan with a pair of jeans.

"You don't want to look like you've dropped out of a time warp," she says. "Pick out a vintage accessory and team it with a white shirt and jeans – you only need a small touch of vintage."

"A vintage cashmere cardigan is also easy to wear. You can layer it in winter and it looks great over a dress. It's beautifully soft and you've got a classic piece of clothing in your wardrobe. Bags and leather accessories are also fantastic – just start with a snakeskin handbag or an unusual belt."

Sault adds that one benefit of wearing vintage is that the materials and workmanship are usually far superior to garments made today.

"To make a 1950s dress now, with all those pintucks, it just wouldn't happen. The material used in vintage clothing is often better quality than the fabrics you'll see today, too."

That was Guthrie's realisation when working in the mainstream fashion industry in Melbourne. Becoming disillusioned with high-volume production and the fact that

thousands of women wear the same style of blouse or pair of pants, she decided to open her Surry Hills store.

"I studied fashion design in Melbourne and decided to do vintage as a reaction against

everything being mass produced," she says. "We all end up looking the same and I just wanted to offer something different. Many of the clothes in my store are one-offs, so the colours are more vibrant and the fabrics better quality, too."

Step into Coco Repose and enter a space where glamour rules – shelves brim with floral fabric-lined hatboxes and rails are filled with 1940s taffeta and velvet cocktail dresses. Guthrie says she keeps an eye on general fashion trends, fashion-led television shows and hit movies and then sources vintage clothes to match.

"Last summer maxi dresses were all the rage and I managed to find a heap of them from the past – everyone who came in loved having an original version," she says. "I also have brides coming in for vintage wedding dresses and the latest trend is to let bridesmaids pick out a 1950s dress. The colours might be different but the era is the theme – then the bride brings it all together with the shoes and the flowers. It works out a lot cheaper, too."

Of course, not everyone has access to fabulous inner-city stores like these – which is why vintage fairs such as Becky Sharp's Vanity Fair Market, held at Leichhardt Town Hall once a month, and the bi-annual Sydney Vintage Clothing, Jewellery and Textiles Show, at Canterbury Racecourse and in Bangalow, northern NSW, have been such a success.

Founder of the Sydney Vintage Clothing Show Janel Morrissey held her first retro clothing fair in Lidcombe in 2006 – and ended

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up selling out of most of her 1920s flapper dresses. That was when she realised a generation of Australian women didn't want to hunt for bargains at op shops and decided to open up her online vintage clothing store, lovevintage.com.au, to a wider market.

"For young girls, going to op shops is seen as cool," she says. "But there's a middle range of women in their late 20s and 30s upwards who want good-quality vintage clothes that are well made, that they can wear out and make a statement, without scouring second-hand shops."

With a penchant for pre-1950s fashion, Morrissey says her vintage fair is a hunting ground for some of Sydney's top design talent.

"Sass & Bide's design team always comes along and Collette Dinnigan sends her designers to look for beaded pieces. It's a rare chance to see all of these amazing clothes in one place."

And the last word on why we love vintage must go to Grandma (aka Sault): "The best thing about wearing vintage is when a friend asks you where you got your dress and you reply: 'It's vintage.' What you're really saying is: 'No, you can't get one, because there's no other dress like it.' They can't buy it online or in a shop – it's one of a kind. It's the best way to stamp originality on your wardrobe."

"Sometimes women come into the shop and ask if the clothing is second-hand – they get a surprise to find that it is original because the clothes are in such beautiful condition," she says. "They don't realise that when a dress no longer fits or doesn't suit them any more, it can have a whole other life."

Foster adds that anyone who wear vintage – start small and never dress head to toe in pre-loved fashion.

"Just add a dash of vintage. Scarves and accessories are good, because they don't need to fit you –



Grandma Takes a Trip in Surry Hills.

Trendsetter ... Angelina Jolie frocks out in *Changeling*.

Vintage fairs coming up

□ **Janel Morrissey's Sydney Vintage Clothing, Jewellery and Textiles Show** takes place twice a year, every April and October, at Canterbury Park Function Centre, Canterbury Racecourse, King Street, Canterbury. See lovevintage.com.au or call 6628 6688.

□ **Becky Sharp's Vanity Fair Market** happens on the second Saturday of every month at Leichhardt Town Hall. The next market is scheduled for July 11.

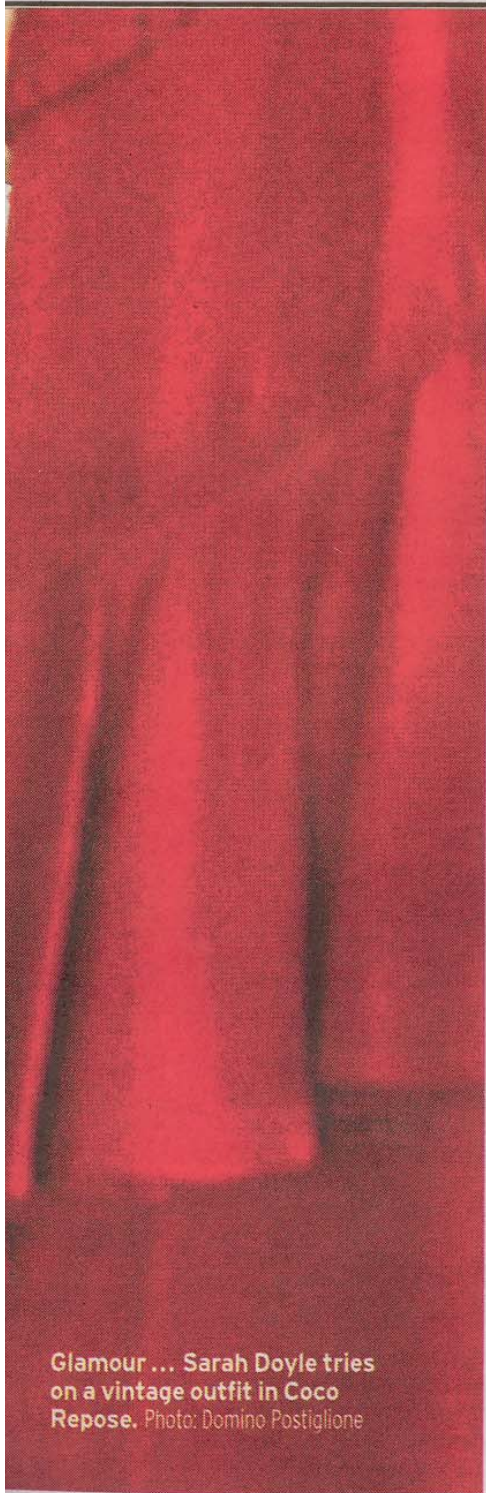
□ **In Bangalow, northern NSW, another Vanity Fair Market** will be held on July 25. See vanityfairmarkets.com or call 0408 103 258.

□ **Magnolia Square pre-Christmas shopping event** Thursday, November 19; Friday, November 20; Saturday, November 21 at Randwick Race Course will include some vintage wares including jewellery, children's clothes and kimonos. See magnoliasquare.com.au.



ESSENTIAL

style



Glamour ... Sarah Doyle tries on a vintage outfit in *Coco Repose*. Photo: Domino Postiglione

Old school at home

Give a nostalgic nod to the past with vintage homewares from these shops.

IF YOU'RE looking to add a vintage vibe to your home, hunt down collectable Clarice Cliff geometric crockery sets and cream and green 1950s tea and coffee canisters at retro fairs such as the **Sydney Vintage Clothing, Jewellery And Textiles Show**. Or visit the **Sydney Antiques Centre**, stocking Murano glassware, Wedgwood and Lalique crystal.

If you just love the colour and style of vintage homewares but don't mind the era it's made in, there are plenty of modern takes on the trend. **Cath Kidston**

pioneered the look in the mid-'90s, reinventing '50s housewife chic with exquisite floral fabrics, atmospheric old-school candlestick holders and antique blankets. Closer to home, Australian label **Lark & Friends** recently used imagery from the iconic Ladybird books on a range of cake tins, retro wall clocks and tin trays.

