



**Looking Your Best
Winning The Wardrobe War
How to tame your closet and find the wardrobe
you never knew you already had
by Joanna Pompilio**

Yes, you have a closet full of clothes and nothing to wear. I know, I do too! Well, maybe it's not that you don't have the right clothes-it's just that you can't find them!

Organizing the remains of what once resembled a closet should not be a chore but a foray into creating an entirely new wardrobe out of what is already hidden in that cluttered mess. Look at it as shopping without spending a dime. It's easier than you think.

To create the ideal closet it is essential to edit all the clothes you own. Start by going through everything, and take out whatever has not been worn during the past two years. If something has not been worn in that time period, it's probably never going to see a night out on the town or otherwise. Chuck it!

Wardrobes should be thinned out at least once, if not twice, a year on a seasonal basis, according to Michelle T. Sterling, founder of Global Image Group. "This ensures clothes are always in good repair, fit properly and are still in style," she adds.

Set aside a few hours and throw on good undergarments. Be prepared. This is a time when you will be trying on lots of clothes so have a full-length mirror nearby with good lighting. And for some, perhaps, a glass of wine.

Empty out your closet entirely and stack all clothing and accessories around the room in piles according to their type: jackets, skirts, pants, sweaters, scarves, etc. Move from pile to pile and try everything on (even the most loved and regularly worn pieces). Take a long, honest look at each item in your mirror and assess not only the fit but how the garment feels. Do not settle for anything less than fabulous. Set aside anything that is uncomfortable or unflattering.

Evaluate the rest of your stuff and categorize it using the three R's: Reject, Repair and Recycle. The reject pile will consist of pieces that are unusable and worn out. Put items that need manageable alterations (like hems, new buttons, taking in or letting out) in the repair bin. And remember, don't procrastinate about sending these clothes to your seamstress once the closet's facelift is complete, otherwise new clutter will be born! Donate anything left over to a charity organization, and place the rest of the clothes and accessories in a recycle box. Getting rid of things becomes easier when you visualize someone else benefitting from them. Pick an organization, and learn as much as you can about it. Read its literature, check out its website and visit the facility, if possible. Get the kids involved too, so they can see the rewards of giving and helping others.

At this point, a line has been drawn between fabulous and frumpy. This is when a new wardrobe can start to reveal itself, and new ensembles come out of what you already own. Try different combinations of clothing that were never worn together previously. Experiment and keep an open mind to ensure nothing is ruled out until it has been tried on.

"Taking pieces of outfits that you always wear together and then mixing them with other outfits will help you find you have more clothes that go together than you think," recommends Pamela Burns, owner of Pamshops4you.

Not sure where or how to begin creating new ensembles? Ask a girlfriend who has great style to come over and help out. Next weekend, switch roles and help her as wardrobe consultant.

"My best advice is to be true to yourself and your sense of style," advises Alison Lukes, personal wardrobe stylist and former creative image manager for Michael Kors. "If wide legged pants don't flatter your body type, don't buy into that trend. Fashion has so many options at every price point that it's important to have fun with it, while dressing appropriately for the occasion and one's age."

Accessories can make all the difference to an outfit, according to Lukes. "First of all, they are an inexpensive way to be current. They are also an easy way to feel 'dressed.' An amazing necklace and killer pair of heels can easily pull together a black cashmere crewneck." In addition, accessories don't come with the fit problem clothes often present.

"Pick out individual, favorite accessories or clothing and commit to building new looks around each piece," suggests Today Show fashion expert Amy Salinger, www.amysalinger.net "Magazine looks you like are a good guide to follow if you need a little help," adds Salinger. Work with accessories that have been lost beneath all the clutter to bring the individuality out of the simplest clothes. Remember, changing accessories can alter the entire look of an ensemble.

"Every woman is different and her accessories should represent that," emphasis Salinger. "If you are not a big jewelry girl, don't worry. You can stick to your diamond studs and simple chain-link bracelet. If you have the guts to go the distance, try gold hoops and a bunch of gold bangles. They add a bit of fun to any outfit."

As you are trying on pieces, start a list of what you need to purchase. Prioritize the list with five items needed most to complete the new wardrobe. Keep the list handy while shopping, and only look for those five items. If there is something else that catches your eye, refrain from buying it and just add it to the main list. As you buy an item from your top five, move another item up to the priority list. That impulse item you once fell in love with at the store may eventually make it to your top five. If it doesn't, you didn't need it in the first place!

Next, you'll want make your closet as appealing as possible. Organize your merchandise so that it looks like a store display. Keeping the closet orderly ensures maximum wearability of clothes and allows the most creativity because you can see all your clothing options at once. Hang similar items together. Break up suits and hang the skirts with other skirts and suit jackets with other jackets and blazers. By hanging them up as separates, you will begin to see them as independent pieces and new clothing combinations will be easier to spot.

Color coding is a great way to find pieces quickly, especially during the pre-work, morning rush. Hang items from left to right, and organize from white to black. Keep clothes in groups, sweaters with sweaters, shirts with shirts.

On the top shelf on your closet store linen boxes filled with out-of-season items like bathing suits. Put cashmere sweaters in bags with cedar balls so moths don't eat your sweaters for dinner.

Look at the things you're keeping and figure out where you need more space. If you're a woman who owns a lot of handbags, try to make room for a few more.

Shopping in your closet can be a refreshing experience. Just let those creative juices flow as you think of your personal style and icons like friends, relatives or even movie stars you admire. Who knows? You may have more "va-va-va voom" items just waiting for you to realize why you bought them in the first place.