

So many clothes, so little closet space

It takes a tough gal to throw in the towel and call in Fashion Fix

So what if you haven't worn it for 10 years, at least. You always loved the colors in that two-piece dress with the long skirt. Who knows when the waist elastic died?

An intrepid Pat Summers, right, contemplates her wardrobe woes, soon to be remedied by Paula Molino of Fashion Fix.



By Pat Summers
Special Writer

Maybe it's a personality type. Maybe it's not exactly a character flaw, but then again, it can provoke frustration, anger, even lashing out. When, in fact, cleaning out is what's needed.

The clearest sign of this disorder is in the afflicted person's closets, storage chests, armoires, garment bags. Possibly all of those. It can get very ugly. It's clothes. A plethora of them, yet "nothing to wear."

You'll know who you are if you recognize clothes like these:

- That classic camel dress coat. You can't even remember when you bought it, but you keep it to put off shopping for a new one. True, it's a bit worn at the cuffs, a little baggy in the back. And was it always shaggy-looking, or is that the alpaca in it?
- Its brilliant emerald shade called out to you years ago... and you enjoy the color each time you move the silk tank top from one closet to another.
- Way many pairs of pricey leather pumps that worked during your "dress for success" period, but they're useless, and dated, today. Same with the "fashion boots."
- Nautical looks always attracted you. A piny this linen top with the big middy collar you love came only in this strange shade of ... greige. (Could that be why you never wear it?)
- These blazers, so perfect with jeans... when you remember them. Just as well, maybe. They're strangely long and full, compared with the blazers you see around now.
- A wide woven leather belt in your favorite autumn-leaf color. It doesn't take up much space, so why not keep it, even though you haven't worn a belt since college?
- So what if you haven't worn it for 10 years, at least. You always loved the colors in that two-piece dress with the long skirt. Who knows when the waist elastic died?

And so on, and on. Clothing items you bought too long ago, in haste, for their color or price, or because you just had to have them. They're all still with you. And because you may wear some of them occasional-



At the end of the day, all of these outfits are going, going, gone.

ly, they also require dry cleaning or laundering before the inevitable closet switch at change of season.

We've said nothing of half-slips in all lengths and colors, partyhats and knee-highs that once were necessary — or seemed so, anyway. And let's not even start on jewelry.

What to do? How do you get rid of enough "hangers-on hangers" to re-claim your closets and maybe even get some clothes you'll actually wear? Now there's an idea.

If you're unlikely to do it for yourself (you're reading this, aren't you?), it may take a stealer will than yours to finally get rid of the stuff. You can pay someone else to say the things about your clothes that you refuse to. Then you'll hear things like this:

- "Tired" describes that beige silk quilted jacket you thought was neutral and all-purpose. Same with that pily tank top you bought because... well, because it was there?
- When your full-ish (or is it "shapeless"?) linen dress is labeled a "black maternity dress," any possible separation anxiety instantly evaporates.
- It may have meant winter coziness to you, but a clothes-savvier someone sees that big, black ribbed cardigan as a "grandfather sweater."
- The cruelest cut may come when your winter holiday special — a cobalt blue wool vest with reindeer silhouettes and sequins — is dismissed as "schoolteacher clothes," with the explanation that primary school teachers often buy clothes with motifs their pupils will like.

If you're wishing for a clothes purge, Paula Molino, proprietor of Fashion Fix, a full-service fashion consulting business, is the "clothes-savvier someone" to facilitate it. Based in Yardley, Pa., she usually schedules house calls after a telephone chat that clarifies just what seems to be needed.

And even while being brutally frank about what she sees during her wardrobe analysis — a trip through every closet, a look at every garment, a judgment call — she's thoroughly nice.

The mother of twin boys under 2 years old, Ms. Molino appears with "that bandbox look" after hours of helping a client shop for clothes (an optional step in the process of identifying what's not working and should go, and actually getting rid of them). Building on an earlier Q-and-A phone session, she's ready to talk about face shape and body type and most becoming colors if that's desired, or she'll head straight for the closets.

A couple hours later, Ms. Molino has created doot-loads of garments on hangers and mountains of shoe boxes, with belts and purses tossed on top. These clothes are on the way out. Their unsuitability has been established. They do not mix and match, and even if they did, they were overreaching.

Your suppressed sensings about much of your wardrobe have been unequivocally confirmed. Now, alone, you face piles and mountains of clothes you must get rid of. But how and where? Some things may be fit only for the drop-boxes usually located near supermarkets. Word has it that those clothes go eventually to Third World countries, where their fibers can be reused. Then, maybe there's a friend or relative, a young professional in your circle, who wears the same size and would welcome carefully selected hand-me-downs. You can't have too many cotton turtlenecks for layering — but OK, OK, not the reindeer vest.

Another route for reasonably new, good-condition clothing that simply isn't "you" or needed anymore, try consignment shops. Be aware that some have quite specific ground rules, as well as attitude, but if your garments are accepted for re-sale, you may get a percentage back.

Or, with presentable and not beyond-the-pale shabby clothes, you could reach out to charities and social service agencies in your area. For some of their clients, a donated winter coat may be the only winter

coat possible. Women returning to the work force may be able to use sweaters, tops, dresses, suits, slacks.

HomeFront's operations, for instance, include a store where clients can "shop" for what they need and a program for women going back to work. Used clothing is sought for both, and donors get a receipt for tax purposes.

It can all depend on the person you talk to in making a contact. Today an agency may be "overloaded" with used clothing; tomorrow, the same stuff is welcome. To save yourself a clothes-filled car ride in vain, make sure you talk with a person who knows about the ebb and flow of donations.

When your closets are so barren they cry out for restocking, you're ready for the next step: clothes-shopping. (Remember to leave yourself enough clothes for such expeditions.)

This time, you're hoping, you won't buy on impulse or because there's an important event looming. You'll know what shades and styles are best for you and how to mix and match pieces. You won't adopt orphans or colors you love... But all that is another story.

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Goodwill Industries, 1628 Olden Ave., Ewing, (609) 392-2865.

HomeFront, 1880 Princeton Ave., Lawrence Township, (609) 989-9417.

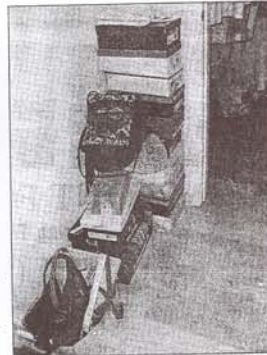
Princeton Consignment Boutique, Route 206, Skillman, (609) 924-2288.

Rescue Mission, 98 Carroll St., Trenton, (609) 695-1436 or (800) 528-8825.

Salvation Army Thrift Store, 1842 S. Broad St., Trenton, (609) 695-4164.

Vietnam Veterans of America, (phone for pick-up) (800) 775-8387.

Womanspace, 1860 Brunswick Pike, Lawrence Township, (609) 394-9000.



Yet more good stuff — shoes, boots, accessories — soon to be en route elsewhere.