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These Days Those Secondhand Threads Are Big Business in Los Angeles

By Andrew Asch Retail Editor

More than 10 years ago, the idea of wearing secondhand clothes or vintage garb carried a certain stigma, according to some style watchers, but that no longer holds true. The fashion market is changing.

While traditional retailers have been shrinking their store footprints as fast as their leases run out, boutiques that carry used garments are experiencing an uplift with a 7 percent annual growth rate in 2016 and again in 2017, according to the **Association of Resale Professionals**, located in the Detroit area.

Jolie Mittleman of **TOBE** trend forecasters said part of this uptick in recycled apparel is a function of fashion. "There is a big resurgence of over-the-top individuality expressed through the way people are dressing. It's exploding and vintage and thrift are growing in direct relation to that," Mittleman noted.

For luxe, designer and unique clothes, Los Angeles is fast becoming a hub for shoppers because of a flurry in high-end vintage stores popping up in LA.

Some of those new outposts located on prominent retail streets include **Entre Nous**, which opened on Robertson Boulevard in December. Another newcomer is **Sophie of Beverly Hills**, which debuted in April near the corner of Brighton Way and Rodeo Drive. At about the same time, **Golden Age**, a vintage shop that popped up on Melrose Avenue last year, added a second location in Silver Lake. **Depop.com**, an online community focusing on secondhand clothes, recently introduced a physical store in Silver Lake,



JEREMY TAYLOR

The Depop store in Silver Lake



Randi Wood of Entre Nous

a short walk from the bustling Sunset Junction intersection, filled with cafés and boutiques.

The popularity and fashion desirability of used and vintage clothing has hit the mainstream market. **What Goes Around Comes Around**, a New York-based purveyor of authentic luxury apparel and accessories with flagship stores in Manhattan and Beverly Hills, currently runs a pop-up shop at the **Macy's** flagship on New York's Herald Square.

High-end e-emporium **The Real Real** made headlines this year when it was rumored it was trying to raise \$100 million in new funding. This is on top of the \$170 million the San Francisco-headquartered company has raised since opening in 2011.

Ludovic Orlando, Golden Age's cofounder, said Los Angeles is an important center for high-end vintage with a history based in the en-

tertainment industry. Sellers of high-end vintage have been coming to LA for years to sell unique garments and vintage fashion to film and TV companies.

Later, these sellers opened warehouses filled with these unique garments so they could work with film shoots. Orlando said a good part of his business is selling his merchandise to stylists working on movies and TV shows. Another part of his venture is selling Golden Age's line of new clothes, which is influenced by the glamour of Hollywood's Golden Age. The collection sells sweatshirts with the names of actors, such as Gary Cooper, from the Golden Age of cinema.

Randi Wood, the owner of **Entre Nous**, said e-commerce and a new generation of shoppers is fueling high-end vintage and secondhand clothing sales right now. "If a 60-year-old woman

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comes in and finds out it is consignment, she'll walk right out," Wood said. "The 20-year-olds are fine with it. It's like **Airbnb**. The older generation typically wants to stay in a hotel. The younger generation will want to stay in an apartment and live like the locals do."

Last October, Wood acquired *Entre Nous*, which ran a storefront business on Third Street, and moved it to Robertson Boulevard while opening an e-commerce site at the same time.

She said her store is different from others because of the consumer experience it offers. "It's like a personal styling appointment," she said of the shop, which features wallpaper from designer **Kelly Wearstler**.

E-commerce is a new frontier being explored by vintage clothing sellers, particularly on e-

commerce sites, including **Etsy** and **eBay**.

And online shopping sites are expanding. Depop started as an online community in Italy where people share their collections, whether it be vinyl records, paintings or whatever is in one's closet. The community quickly focused on vintage clothing, said Maria Raga, Depop's London-based chief executive officer.

"The way we look at it, we have unique inventory that is not on the high streets," she said, using the British term for boutique neighborhoods. "You find things that are very unique that you cannot find anywhere else."

Many of Depop's community members take old clothes and put their own stamp on them by adding new graphics or retooling the fabric to create something new.

Doris Raymond, the owner of the Los Angeles-based vintage store **The Way We Wore**, said the market is being hurt by its success. "There are too many people. When you flood a market, you depress the value," she said.

It also confuses the public about the nature of high-end vintage. There's a difference between the mass-market clothes of yesteryear and what is defined as quality vintage. The items found in *The Way We Wore* are close to their original condition. Often she has experts repair leather and jewelry to return them to their original glory and then sells them from \$65 to \$6,000 with an average price of \$295.

"It's not just about labels," Raymond said. "It's about how well a garment is made and how a piece can transcend time." ●