



# A NEW LOOK AT CONSIGNMENT

TAKE A TOUR OF SOME OF THE REGION'S HOTTEST SECOND-TIME AROUND BOUTIQUES

BY LESLIE MARTINI ✨ PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRIANNA MOORE



With today's high gas prices and sluggish economy, it's no wonder luxury retailers are fretting. Consumers are feeling the squeeze, rethinking that quick jaunt to Boston to shell out the dough for the latest Marc Jacobs bag. But what if you could find designer labels like Missoni or Nanette Lapore, or vintage Henri Bendel, right here on the North Shore, and put those dollars back into our local economy? Rethinking "consignment" might mean that the chic city wardrobe of your dreams is closer than you think.

Not long ago, "consignment" was a word mostly whispered if said at all. It did little to soothe our discomfort with buying, much less wearing, another's toss-aways. But fashion-forward cities like Paris have led the way by taking the "un-cool" out of consignment with trendy resale boutiques popping up on nearly every corner. Here at home, thanks to concern for the environment and the economy, recycling and frugality are now fashionable. Nowhere is this more evident than right here on the North Shore. Used clothing stores ranging from funky thrift shops to upscale boutiques are everywhere. Some have just opened. Others have been around 30 years or more. The new ones are attracting attention, and the older ones are getting a second look.

Come along with me on this "something for everyone" road trip as we wind through some of our favorite coastal towns to check out this new life of consignment.

We start our tour in the charming seaside town of Marblehead, where consignment is a big business. Currently there are three shops within a few steps of one another. Rumors of a



new kid coming to town keep competition robust.

**Treasure Chest** has been at its original location at 124 Pleasant St. for over 30 years. It is the oldest consignment shop in town and by far the most modest, with its no-nonsense, no-frills appearance. While the selection varies from day to day, the consistent list of consignors and the shop's inclusion in the "Best of Northshore" awards tell us they are doing something right. The store is larger than its local competitors, and the only one in Marblehead to offer a small selection of high-end men's clothing, too. The true designer labels are not abundant, but if you show up on the right day and delve in, they are there for the taking. The day of our visit, the store is bustling with activity. Three different consignors wait to drop off their castoffs. A great pair of AG jeans (looking hardly worn) for \$58 and a perfect pair of black strappy Stuart Weitzman sandals for \$48 marked the beginning of a daylong binge.

Immediately to the right at 120 Pleasant St. is the second-oldest consignment shop in town, **Rags to Riches**. A fire forced the owner to

close down the original location five years ago. But with repeated requests from customers, Rags to Riches was soon back, making the most of its new space on Pleasant Street with an eclectic mix of trendy and very reasonably priced shoes, handbags, funky jewelry, jeans, and summer T's. We have our choice of color and size with the selection of Michael Stars T-shirts, and I find yet another pair of great jeans, this time Sevens. I eye a bohemian Nanette Lepore sundress from afar, but as I make my way toward it, a 20-something moves in, confirming my suspicion that I may be outgrowing Nanette!

At the edge of Old Town at 231 Washington St. is the most recent newcomer in Marblehead, **Madam Had'em**, which opened its doors in 2004. A beautiful interior complete with custom-designed Victorian-style shelving and display cases has customers asking, "Is it really consignment?" The offerings here are consistently upscale, with designers like Manolo Blahnik, Prada, and Pucci making up the majority of Madam's merchandise. The strict policies of



"designer only" and "no more than two years old" keep the merchandise both top-notch and current. A nutmeg-colored Chloe Paddington bag retailing for \$1,540 is selling here for \$650 – a steal given its "new" condition. I find a black Max Mara skirt, long and sheer lace over an opaque slip, with the original retail tag of \$298 still on it.

Paying only \$48 for it, I tell myself I am actually earning money by purchasing it. I do this when finding a treasure at TJ Maxx or Marshalls



✿ Outside Modern Millie, Salem

too. I show my husband the tag that says, "Compare at" so he knows how much money we are actually saving. People come from Boston and Lexington to get first dibs, and the word is spreading quickly. The highly coveted "Gold" award for consignment shops in Marblehead was just awarded to Madam Had'em in June.

Marbleheaders have yet another hidden treasure in the **Magic Hat Thrift Shop**, located behind the Marblehead Veterans Middle School at 217 Pleasant St. This little engine that could began when a small group of parents decided to lend a hand to the public schools in their district. The all-volunteer staff sells adult and children's clothing, household items, toys, games books – and most important, a very generous mentality. The result? A perfect illustration of the maxim attributed to Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Exiting Marblehead and heading west on 114, we come to **Modern Millie**. With its strong sense of whimsy, it seems the embodiment of Salem's

refreshing irreverence. Located at 103 Washington St., "Millie" is smack-dab in the heart of Witch City. With wonderful curbside appeal, Millie's draws attention from drive-by and foot traffic alike with its ever-changing sidewalk mannequin, sales bins, and colorful windows. I am amazed at the number of people rummaging through the sidewalk bins, intent on finding gold. Although the space is small, its warmth feels inviting rather than stifling. The store buzzes with college students, tourists, and resale gurus in search of great prices and that authentic vintage boutique feel. Hats, beads, scarves, and hip summer frocks all packed into less than 500 square feet. A gorgeous black satin evening bag (think Audrey Hepburn) with a gold lamé latch opens to reveal its yellowed original "Saks Fifth Avenue" label. For a mere \$25, I am reincarnated.

Heading north along the scenic Route 1A North, we follow 128 to the end of the earth and into "America's Oldest Seaport," on Cape Ann. We park on Main Street in Gloucester and watch the locals mingle, soaking up their beloved heritage, remind-

ing us once again of how few places are as unencumbered as this seaside residence.

**The Dress Code**, at 159 Main St., has been in business for more than 10 years, and its spiritual focus on "cleansing" is evident. A strong theme of offering people a place to rid themselves of their hoarding mentality and to give back to the community has been responsible for attracting over 5,000 consignors from not only Massachusetts, but New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, as well as Maine and Vermont. The feeling of honesty resonates here, and I feel compelled to offer more than asked for a scarf that catches my eye: \$8 seems too little to pay for something that could be used as a belt and a scarf. After leaving, one feels an overwhelming desire to "let go" of material things. The Dress Code serves as inspiration by not only donating to shelters as so

## Other Stores Worthy of a Visit:

### PANDORA'S BOX

14 Pleasant St.  
Newburyport, MA 01950  
978.463.3377

### GENTRY'S CONSIGNMENTS

49 Liberty St.  
Newburyport, MA 01950  
978.463.0040

### MOXIE FASHION CONSIGNMENT & ANTIQUES

244 Newburyport Tpke.  
Rowley, MA 01969  
978.948.3351

### A CHANGE OF PAGE

6 Washington St  
North Reading, MA 01864  
978.664.1188

### RERUN BOUTIQUE

330 Rantoul St.  
Beverly, MA 01915  
978.922.5422

### SECOND AVENUE

315-A Cabot St.  
Beverly, MA 01915  
978.927.7023

### THE MERCANTILE

68 Park St.  
Andover, MA 01810  
978.475.7940



\* Bananas, Gloucester

many resale shops do, but actively encouraging others to do the same.

For a moment, I am guilt-ridden over the purchases waiting for me in the car, feeling even more conspicuous in my obnoxiously oversized designer sunglasses. I make my way to **Bananas**, halfway down Main Street, taking a personal oath to clean out my closet, removing one item for every new (or old) item going in.

A slogan hanging in the window of Bananas sums up this truly eccentric ménage of more than just clothing: "Vintage Clothing From the Past and Beyond." The slogan bodes well for the countless locals and visitors who have kept this business going for over 30 years. Antique rugs, and festive hats and jewelry, along with a set of Andy Warhol plates, work together to give Bananas an infectious party atmosphere reminiscent of the 1920s. For \$10, I settle on a pair of darkretro sunglasses – the kind one would wear for protection from the paparazzi.

After a quick stop at Woodman's we are back on track, now heading into Ipswich. I reason that some slim-fitting number would surely serve as a reminder to forgo the endless temptations of North Shore delicacies. Despite my reliable GPS leading the way, I drive right past the unimposing **Forget Me Not** at 31 S. Main St., perhaps distracted

simply to window-shop, I dip in once again, justifying all the while how much I am actually helping the local economy. For \$85, I leave with a sleeveless black knit Betsey Johnson swing dress, pleated just above the knee; an ice-blue cashmere TSE sweater; a sleeveless chartreuse Missoni tank; and a floral print dress for one of my daughters, who are 11 and 9 – it has to fit someone! I pride myself on talking my way out of yet another evening bag, this one cream and black, vintage Henri Bendel. In these types of stores, it is often the employees who add character; never was that more apparent than at Forget Me Not. This most gracious saleswoman told me proudly, but without a hint of boastfulness, that Forget Me Not has more than 900 consignors from all over the Boston area. It is easy to see why they don't forget.

It is afternoon now, and Manchester-by-the-Sea is calling, I reflexively plug in the address for **The Stock Exchange**, even though I could drive there blindfolded. I often do my share of purging here, where household and clothing items move quickly. In my car are two lamps my children have outgrown, a set of dishes that were put aside for a rainy day, and a never-used chafing dish. The relief associated with the taking is almost congruous with the rush of buying. The money from consigning goes right into a charitable fund, and when those checks arrive, I am thankful for the circuitous buying and cleansing process.

The Stock Exchange is legendary. For 33 years, with the help of creative in-store displays, handsome window designs, and a great deal of hard work, this antiquated, abundant space has earned credibility and high ratings as a North Shore institution. At 3 Beach St., quality clothing, household items, furniture, and you-name-it have sold a hundred times over creating a foolproof formula for an extremely successful business. The Stock Exchange seems to have struck just the right balance. Its delicate concoction of eclectic goods might not have the same impact standing alone, but together, they have lent this cornerstone tremendous clout.

My wallet and gas tank are nearly empty, dusk is approaching, and we haven't made it to the more than seven other stops on my list. I am more than satisfied but find myself once again rethinking that term "consignment," that process of giving and taking. Before unpacking my bags, I do a quick Google search and come up with the following:

To consign, according to Webster's, is "to entrust, devote, commit, and/or banish." I couldn't have said it better. ■



\* The Dress Code, Gloucester