

FASHION

Websites that enable users to buy and sell pre-owned designer label items are gaining popularity, writes Francesca Fearon

Luxe redux

We all love a designer label and we all love a bargain, but biannual sales only happen, well, twice a year. So what do we do during those other months when we want to feed our designer habit, but are on a budget? We turn to the internet.

In the virtual world, several upmarket fashion websites have discreet channels where sale merchandise is available year round. Net-a-porter launched an entire site, called TheOutnet.com, full of previous seasons' markdowns.

But there is another route to satisfy the habit of discount junkies, and one that savvy fashion shoppers in Europe are latching onto fast: re-commerce sites.

"Re-commerce" is a rather inelegant industry word for pre-owned luxury fashion items that are bought and sold. In Britain and France, sites have opened up such as Hardly Ever Worn It, Vestiaire Collective and Covetique; these are luxury online platforms for selling designer fashion that may or may not have been worn before. Someone's fashion mistake may be another's must-have. Vestiaire Collective and Covetique's curated sites have fixed prices for the nearly new

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SHARON WOLTER FERGUSON

Saint Laurent, Stella McCartney, Hermès, and so forth. Hardly Ever Worn It works a bit like eBay as an auction site, although it's considerably more sophisticated. So if you are lusting after a Fendi bag, a Chanel dress or a pair of Alexander Wang shoes, these are good places to go hunting.

Each site operates slightly differently. At Vestiaire Collective, you can sell your nearly new items; they will choose what they consider will

sell from an analysis of what's trading on their site. After having checked its authenticity, they will photograph and post it online, and once it's sold, ship it on your behalf. Their commission for the service is 30 per cent on average, but it is 15 per cent for items under £40 (HK\$527) and over £2,500.

Hardly Ever Worn It takes a different approach, relying on the seller to photograph the item along with any tags that proves its authenticity. They trust the seller to show the true condition of the product illustrating scratches, and to self-upload the picture with a note mentioning the original price. It then goes up for auction for a minimum of three days. When it sells, the website handles the transaction and the seller ships it to the buyer.

The company's commission is 15 per cent on regular consumer to consumer sales, and 30 per cent for the VIP service, where the seller sends



Sharon Wolter Ferguson (middle) with daughters Natalya (left) and Tatiana.

their items to company offices where the in-house staff will take care of all the admin, photos and selling. If an item doesn't sell immediately it will rotate on the system until it sells, or is channelled into one of the regular sales. Vestiaire Collective was launched in France five years ago by a group of founders with expertise in

different areas of fashion, communications and IT who realised there was a need for a trusted resale site.

One of the founders, Fanny Moizant, who runs the London hub, says they became aware of large numbers of people who had great designer items that they no longer had space for and were looking to resell.

Coupled with what she dubs the "recessionistas phenomenon" – the result of the economic downturn – in France, there was an abundance of fashion bloggers who were reselling items on their own blogs without an e-commerce tool.

The Vestiaire brings all of them together on the same platform. The site now has two million users and operates in Europe and the US. Moizant anticipates the market growing to the East.

Hardly Ever Worn It already operates globally, with sellers from around the world, says founder Sharon Wolter Ferguson, who launched the re-commerce site three years ago with her two daughters, Natalya and Tatiana.

Her core markets are Britain, the US, New Zealand, Canada, Hong Kong and Australia, and they currently have 120,000 sales per month.

"I was living in Monte Carlo, my children were at school and I had time on my hands, so I was looking for somewhere to sell my clothes and accessories," says Wolter Ferguson. "One shop charged 50 per cent to 60 per cent [commission]."

Galvanised into action, she researched eBay and wasn't very impressed. "If you want to buy a Chanel dress, you don't go to buy it at the equivalent of a chain store."

She saw an opportunity to create a platform for women like her to sell their designer label clothes. Brimming with enthusiasm and armed with an address book of well-connected friends, she launched the site.

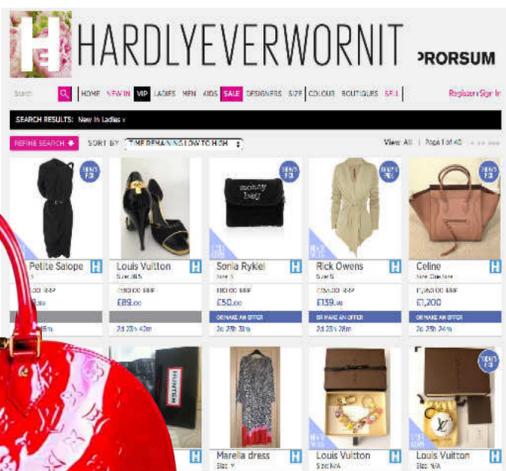
daughter, Tatiana, appeared on the television programme *Made in Chelsea* with close friend Chloe Green, daughter of retail billionaire Philip Green. One of the camera crew leaked rumours that Kate Moss was sending limousines full of clothes to the site to sell. That wasn't true at the time, but these days quite a few celebrities such as Sienna Miller, Harry Styles, Tracey Emin and Kate Moss do sell through the site to raise money for charity.

"After sitting in my pyjamas thinking about how I would market the site," she says, "I was soon getting glowing reports in the *Daily Mail* and *Grazia*."

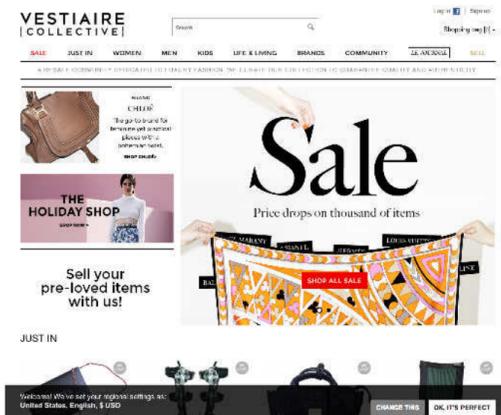
About 30 per cent of the business comes from celebrities selling their "gifted" designer gear for charity, while the rest is from individuals selling items like Givenchy boots and Hermès Birkins.

One Birkin sold recently for £3,800 and another luxurious one for £28,000. Louboutin's classic black Pigalle patent pump sold for £270, while the original price was £395. So the site is a good way to gauge what people will pay for a pre-owned designer item.

These websites have tapped a sweet spot for fashion lovers on a budget, and it's likely that consumer bases for pre-owned luxury will spread further around the globe. Fashion clients seem to be more accepting to the idea of pre-owned items. Judging by the growth of vintage fashion and luxury item sales in the recent years in Hong Kong and the mainland, the opportunity seems to be there.



Louis Vuitton Alma PM Pomme D'Amour Red Monogram Vernis Canvas bag (left) and pink Chanel limited edition bag (above right), both from HardlyEverWornIt.com.



When geometrics become a familiar pattern

Colleen Barry

The line, long under-rated as one of geometry's most basic forms, is getting a lot of exposure on the Milan menswear runway.

Designers are embracing stripes of, well, every stripe, and using them as a metaphor of sorts to clean up the line, that is the silhouettes, of the collections presented during Milan Fashion Week.

For next summer, men can expect to be wearing stripes, both fine and bold, along with pulsating, radiating and curving lines, as well as simple checks, all creating optical effects that bely the simplicity of some of the looks. Lines are also being worked into the fabric, in chunky textiles that create an architecture of their own.

Giorgio Armani says he has done a wholesale clean up of looks for his Emporio Armani collection for next spring and summer.

The predominantly black-and-white collection has a strong graphic



Versace



Gucci

component, with lines transmitting a sense of energy from the garment, from steady pulses, webs and waves up to black and white bold stripes. Colour makes cameos in contrasting stripes of turquoise and aqua-green.

"After years of doing a little bit of everything, a melange, florals and ethnicity, finally a

little cleaning," Armani says.

The silhouette is loose and easy, with pleated trousers or drawstring athletic pants. Silk and cotton shirts loosely cling the frame, and T-shirts, worn under coats, are soft.

The Gucci man for next summer has earned his stripes, along with golden buttons, epaulets, insignias and other trappings of a mariner's life. The collection, shown against a background of shimmering water, has a decidedly nautical flair, featuring trim and dignified white, navy and red suits with suggestions of officialdom in stripes. But these are not mere costumes. The pieces project both luxury and a free spirit.

The silhouette is disciplined, with the expected blazer, double-breasted jacket

and pea coats, but creative director Frida Giannini also includes jackets with Nehru collars and blousons with a contrasting buckle waistband that can function as a shirt or jacket. Pants are lean and straight, or baggy and lose.

Frida Giannini gives the look a modern twist with bold navy and white vertically striped pants and jackets, worn together for an eye-popping optical effect but more often mixed and matched with plain colors.

The stripe also appears on lapels, scarves tucked inside jackets that substitute for ties, and on the straps of the collection's ample leather duffel and messenger bags.

Here's a new one: faux denim. The jeans on the Fendi runway were not at all what they appeared. The shirt was printed cotton and the classic jacket was in reality leather with a denim print.

Besides the denim elaboration, the collection by Silvia Venturi Fendi also featured woven leather pieces and striped knits, as designers continued their study of the line.

Again, there were no ties but silken scarves tucked inside a sweater's V or beneath a jacket lapel. The colour palette was eclectic, with something for every taste. Shoes were mostly slip-on sandals. Bags included a small front-carry pack that stays secure with a triple strap, biker style.

Denim and music have always been a winning combination, as they were on the Fendi runway, where Fendi introduced a new leather-clad coloured headphone in collaboration with Beats by Dr Dre.

The Apulia-based brand Etro is promoting biodiversity in fashion – using natural fibres in part of the menswear collection for next summer, and promoting a diverse diet.

Menswear designer Kean Etro said he wanted to show how thread could be made out of natural products, not only hemp, which is well known, but also banana, cereals and milk. Etro says the message behind the collection is "to keep biodiversity running in agriculture".

The collection opened with a series of looks in natural fibres, maintaining a predominantly white palate before a colour burst of egg blue, salmon pink and canary yellow. Instead of the brand's familiar paisley, the prints were photographs of plates of food, from fruit to crustaceans. Associated Press



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Giorgio Armani