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## Secrets of a Bargain Hunter

The Boston Globe

By Suzanne C. Ryan, Globe Staff | May 8, 2008

The economy is rocky and consumers are leery about parting with their cash. But that doesn't mean the budget-minded are swearing off spending entirely. Real style mavens always manage to find bargains, because they've developed strategies for getting the best price on whatever they're shopping for, be it Italian leather shoes or wenge nesting tables. When are the best sales? When is it OK to negotiate with a salesperson? We asked three stylish Bostonians for their best bargain-hunting tips.

### Mark Kennedy

Management consultant, 54, Roxbury

**When did you become obsessed with bargain hunting?** "It started in earnest in the mid-1970s. When I got out of college, my first job was in downtown Boston. I was always running in and out of Filene's Basement."

**What he shops for:** Home goods and designer clothing.

**His strategy:** Build relationships with sales associates. "They give you the inside track on upcoming sales or they give you favorable pricing on the spot. You have to be nice to people, ask questions, and buy at least something small from time to time. It will pay off in a big way."

**His philosophy:** Be bold. "I made a deal with the owner of Montage that whenever he was ready to re-do his office space, I wanted to buy the glass table he was using as a desk. I wanted it as a dining room table. I would never have been able to afford it. It cost over \$10,000 and the side table he was using was around the same price. I got both pieces for \$5,000, gently used."

**Where he goes:** Home shows. "I bought a Gaggenau oven, which is a high-end German brand, off the floor for 45 percent off price. It was retailing for \$8,000. It wasn't their intention to sell it but they said if I was interested to call them. I called the next day."

**Best-kept secret:** The shoe department at Filene's Basement in Newton. "Cole Haan, Lorenzo Banfi, Johnston & Murphy, Allen Edmonds. If I spend \$100 for a pair of shoes at Filene's Basement, that's a lot. They typically go for less."

**His weekends:** "I am a consistent hawker of specialty shops that are going out of business or doing renovation. Motley Home in the South End was moving its location recently. For three or four weekends in a row, they had slashed their prices. Things that were normally \$200 or \$300 were down to \$25."

**His membership:** DirectBuy showroom in Rockland. "You pay a membership fee, go to their showroom and you're able to buy products at manufacturers' prices. They have kitchen cabinets, couches, granite countertops. I recommend it if you have your eye on a big project. I plan to renovate my basement. I just bought a 47-inch Sony television for \$1,200. It's retailing at Best Buy and Tweeter for \$1,800."

**Best deal this year:** A set of three wenge wood nesting tables at HomeGoods for \$35. "I've seen wenge tables at Bloomingdale's and Adesso. I would have expected to pay \$350 for that set."

### Recent finds

- 1 Donna Karan suit, regularly \$1,800 from Louis, Boston. He paid \$299 at Filene's Basement.
- 2 Shoes by Cole Haan, regularly \$485 at the Cole Haan store. He paid \$59.95 at the Basement.
- 3 Gentiluomo tie from Italy. Originally \$125. He paid \$15 at the Basement.
- 4 Tables: \$35 for the set at HomeGoods. Originally \$350.

## Sabrina Zanella-Foresi

*Documentary film editor, 37, Jamaica Plain*

**When did you become obsessed with bargain hunting?** "In 1993 when I moved to Boston and first stumbled into Filene's Basement. I was into high fashion and I discovered I could get it for 75 percent off."

**What she shops for:** Designer clothing.

**Her strategy:** Get on everyone's e-mail list. "I have a separate e-mail account just for fashion. Stores e-mail me with coupons and to notify me about sales. Stuff comes in every day."

**Her philosophy:** "You can't bargain hunt if you're looking for something specific. Bargain hunting is all about finding the thing you didn't know you needed, at a great price."

**Favorite discounter:** Filene's Basement in Newton. "Now that the Basement at Downtown Crossing has closed, the Newton store is the one to go to. Tons of stuff from Louis Boston and Barneys are dropped there. I just bought a silk cashmere blend turquoise sweater from Barneys at the Basement for \$30. It was \$160."

**Favorite boutique:** Turtle on Tremont Street. "They have emerging designers and cutting-edge urban stuff. Their price point is a little high but I hit the sales. I go right after New Year's and in July. They also have coupons."

**Place to go for handbags:** Marshalls. "They have the best \$100 bags at Marshalls that are easily \$400 to \$500 elsewhere. They are not name brands, but the leather and craftsmanship are beautiful. I bought a bag in Florence, Italy, for \$350, and then I saw the exact same bag at Marshalls for \$100. It convinced me."

**How she gets shoes:** Make the department stores do the work. "I go at sale time. If I find a style I want at a great price but the color or size is wrong, I ask them to track down the correct shoes for me at another store anywhere in the nation. They mail them to me."

**How often she shops:** Constantly. "I am a huge window shopper. I love seeing what's out there and going place to place. I wander down Newbury Street and Boylston Street, always looking for the sales section."

**Best deal this year:** A black shearling hooded jacket from the DKNY store on Newbury Street for \$300, marked down from \$1,800. "They only had it in size petite. I'm a size 2."

### Recent finds

- 1 Brown dress by Gary Graham. Originally \$700. She paid \$125 at Stel's.
- 2 Boots by Cole Haan. Originally \$450. She paid \$219 at Bloomingdale's.

## Mariana Salerno

*Account and operations manager for Stil, 23, Malden*

**What she shops for:** Designer shoes and clothing

**When did you become obsessed with bargain hunting?** "A couple of years ago. I never even knew Marshalls existed. Then one day I wandered in. I was like, 'Why am I paying so much for things?'"

**Her philosophy:** "You can get more for your money if you are willing to go searching. You have to put the time in."

**Her strategy:** "I go browsing three days a week. The thing about these stores is, they are always getting new shipments in. You can go Monday and find nothing. Then on Wednesday, it's all new."

**How she handles temptation:** "You don't pass up a good deal. Take it home, try it on, and see how it works with things in your closet. If not, take it back. But don't wait three days, go back, and find it gone."

**Favorite bargain websites:** [Smartbargains.com](http://Smartbargains.com): "You can find Prada shoes and other designers for sometimes less than \$100 instead of \$500." Shoetube.tv: "Every day they feature a different shoe. It also lists shoe boutiques."

**Best-kept secret:** Marshalls in Framingham and Newton. "They have a large selection of designer shoes. I got a pair of Tahari black leather flats with a large buckle detail on the front for \$39.99. They retail for \$100. This past winter, they had so many nice coats by Dolce & Gabbana and Donna Karan."

**Department store sales:** "Don't be intimidated to go into high-end stores. They have great sales. I bought a CO-OP silk dress at Barneys for \$120 recently. It was originally \$400. At Bloomingdale's, I got a Juicy Couture patent leather clutch with gold metal details for \$150. It was \$329."

**Mix and match:** "I like mixing high-end designers with regular basic stuff. H&M is great for basics. You can get good tops to layer with a more expensive top."

**Her best deal this year:** "I got a pair of Jimmy Choo shoes for \$150 at Gretta Luxe. They were originally \$550. They are a black leather stiletto with a pointy toe. They were more than 70 percent off."

#### Recent finds

- 1 Chloe orange and gray top, originally \$865. She paid \$259 at Gretta Luxe.
- 2 Ports 1961 pants, originally \$329. She paid \$131 at Stil.
- 3 Tahari leather flats, originally \$225. She paid \$59.99 at Filene's Basement.
- 4 Black and gold necklace, \$12.99 at Target
- 5 Jimmy Choo heels, originally \$590. She paid \$177 at [Bluefly.com](http://Bluefly.com)
- 6 Juicy Couture clutch, originally \$175. She paid \$69.99 at Bloomingdale's.
- 7 Karen Zambos silk dress, originally \$360. She paid \$118 at [shopbop.com](http://shopbop.com). ■