

style
on a
shoestring



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For David
Thank you . . . I love you!





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Acknowledgments

FROM A CRAMPED two-bedroom home in Chickasaw, Alabama, with yummy homegrown vegetables, occasional government cheese, stacks of *Vogue* pattern books, lots of loving guidance, and daily lessons in Southern strength and charm, my mother, Beth, and my grandmother Judy taught me the skills and helped me build the confidence necessary to navigate the ultra wealthy and chic terrain of New York's fashion industry, looking like a million without spending a fortune. My skill, my flair, my backbone, and my down-to-earth approach to all of this paint and panache—I owe to you both!

Mom, I could not be happier to have the opportunity to thank you. You taught me by your exquisite example that beauty, style, and grace are skills, learnable by all and not exclusive to the elite. Thank you for your encouragement, strength, sense of pride, and unending love.

I want to thank my loving grandmother, Mammaw as I call her, for reinforcing my mother's economic sophistication by making my clothes and teaching me to sew. Mam-

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And finally, to Beegs—thanks for stopping!

Introduction

FINALLY—I AM SO excited to tell you everything I know (well, almost!). Fashion, beauty, and all things delightfully budgetary have been a passion of mine for years. As a young girl growing up in a small town in Alabama, I was taught the importance of femininity and sophistication from early on. Now I know “Alabama sophistication” may seem like an oxymoron, like jumbo shrimp or right-wing liberal, but I was taught by example. Both my mother and my grandmother worked very hard to tame my wild ways and teach me the importance of looking the part, even if you didn’t have a pot to piss in.

My grandmother (Mammaw) made almost all of my clothes when I was a young girl, and this really allowed my fashion imagination to flourish. We would go to the fabric store and pore over stacks of pattern books, looking for something that we both liked. Then once we had the canvas, we could paint with any fabric and trim that we could dream up. Mammaw always made dressing an event, and the anticipation of slipping into one of her creations was thrilling.

Though my mom didn't sew, she was and still is the epitome of Southern grace, charm, and polished perfection. I was skillfully instructed on skin care, makeup, hair care, and appropriate accessorizing as a rite of passage, and from the day of instruction on, I was expected to present myself like a lady every morning. Of course, I went through a rebellious stage with dyed black hair and a horrible asymmetrical permed do (eek!), but I always respected my mom's incredible style and her drive to avoid having me be perceived as lower class.

I confess the sale rack was the only rack we shopped, and dumpster diving behind the fabric store for discarded creative goodies provided memories I cherish. Mom had a way of blending things to make them look rich, and Mammaw had the skill to whip up a Chanel replica in an afternoon. Together they carved the understanding that you simply do not have to pay a lot of money to look beautiful or to be perceived as educated, celebrated as stylish, or touted for your grace and femininity.

Now, while I was wallowing in my own personal Tennessee Williams Southern sugar bath, God decided he was going to give me an incredible gift. You should know I say God gave this to me, but Mammaw swears it was her collar greens. The gift was just mine, no one else's, and with this gift I could do almost anything. By the age of ten, I had grown to be five feet eleven inches . . . Do I have to tell you what happened next? Yep, by the time I was seventeen, I was a seasoned working model in New York City, making my way, keeping my nose out of trouble, and building on the skills of home.

While I was in the holding room of my modeling agency one day, my booker called me back and took my measure-

ments. By absolute accident, we discovered that I was the exact measurements for a JCPenney tall fit model. She asked if I knew what a fit model was and then briefly explained that a fit model worked with designers to help create clothes that fit the body perfectly. Immediately afterward, she sent me over to a client to fill in for a missing model. At that time, JCPenney set the sizing standard in the industry, so my measurements and my knowledge of sewing and garment construction landed me the opportunity to work with more than forty designers over eight years, helping them create beautiful silhouettes around my frame.

This work is certainly not the glamorous part of the modeling industry, but the lessons I learned and expertise I gathered have served me immensely. I understand how to *fit* a body—any body—like none other, and great fit is half the battle of looking like a million without spending a fortune. After thousands of garments and hundreds of different styles, I learned that beautiful fit is a constant. Styles will come and go, and designers will dish up new duds each season, but what looks the most flattering on a figure will never change. Can I get an *Amen*?

After years as a successful model and trained makeup artist and with a couple of degrees in media studies and broadcast journalism, I thought the progression to TV seemed logical, but it proved much harder than I had expected. Becoming the beauty and style expert on NBC's Emmy-winning daytime reality drama "Starting Over" was an amazing turn of events that allowed me the opportunity to utilize all of my talents and offer up my personal brand of thrifty chic know-how on a public stage. Through that opportunity and the overwhelming response from millions of viewers, my business, Cents of Style, was born.

Style on a Shoestring presents my loving Cents of Style formula—a true system—of how to create incredible style on a hair-thin budget. This formula can be applied to every body type and income level, as style has no boundaries, ladies. I will walk you through the same steps I take with my private clients and the dozens of ladies I have made over on TV. So in effect, you can consider this book a workbook for creating your own makeover!

Know that amazing change takes amazing courage, and as you read this, remember I am talking to you—and yes, you can do this. The most frustrating facet of my work is convincing women of how absolutely beautiful they are and of all the potential they hold. We gals are exquisite creatures, ripe with the power of femininity and volcanic with the bubbling of creative flair just under the surface. We tend to talk ourselves out of true fabulousness, and I want you to push through. Prepare yourself for the inspired *frugalicious* eruption.

If you follow the guidelines for better undies, you will find yourself with higher hooters. (Woo-hoo!) If you dedicate a Saturday to cleaning out your closet, you will discover where you are “style stuck.” If you follow my shopping guidelines, you will save hundreds of dollars on your wardrobe. And if you apply my Cents of Style Color Formula, you will be accessorizing like a “Sex and the City” thrifty diva!

This is your key. Change is rustlin’ in the following pages, and it’s calling your name. If you have any questions or need more personalized help, you can always reach me by visiting my website (centsofstyle.com). I’m here for you—so let’s get started.

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You Don't Have to Spend a Fortune to Look like a Million

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YOUR IMAGE IS important. It is *very* important! We can pretend that people should look past the superficial to see us for who we truly are and convince ourselves that we want to associate only with folks who value the goodness of our heart, not the label in our britches. But let's be honest; that is a steaming pile of hooley. How you look—the visual package you present—is a crucial element in achieving your goals, building self-esteem, establishing relationships, and attracting the love you want.

Your image reflects your moxie and modern spirit. It tells the world about your creativity, productivity, confidence, and direction. Frustrating but true: how you look tells the world how to treat you, because it indicates how you treat yourself. *Sigh* . . . I feel your pain, Hot Stuff.

I know you want to turn heads when you walk into a room, have your friends proclaim your astonishing style, and approach every day with the confidence that what you put on will signal the masses that you are a magical force of individuality. We all want that scrumptious feeling of fashion euphoria experienced when we have on something so

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perfect it makes us feel like a different person—a stronger, more confident, glowing person. That is the spell cast by great style. But here is the deal. Great style is a skill, not a privilege! (Can I get an *Amen*?)

When you understand your body type, fit principles, shopping strategies, and the best times to shop for everything, achieving a great Cents of Style is a snap! Honest. I promise. Throw in a few exercises to build your style muscles, and you have a thrifty diva in the making! And this goes for women of every shape, size, and shade.

If you read the good-humored, realistic advice I lovingly dole out on my website (centsofstyle.com), you know that I am talking to you—the woman who hates her tummy or wishes she had better boobies, dreams of a firmer butt or thinks she has fat arms, likens her legs to tree trunks and speaks of her thighs using the term *thunder*. Perhaps the sixth-grade bully's taunting words still haunt you when you're getting dressed, and you generally feel dizzy from the emotional cocktail of some or all of these perceptions.

You are me; you are we—the glorious mass, united when it comes to being self-critical and thinking we don't have what it takes to be super fabulous. Thanks to advertising and the way that women are represented in the media, we all have incredibly ridiculous standards to live up to. Yep, thanks to you, media machine! Heaven forbid you would support us in feeling great about ourselves; whatever would you sell us?

Well, the following pages are injected with thrifty-chic mojo, and I want you to eat it like a piping hot box of Krispy Kreme doughnuts. Enjoy learning the secrets of the fashion industry that trick you into spending more, ways to make a

five-dollar thrift store find look like a five-hundred-dollar designer deal, and the wardrobe-building strategies that will have you spending less, looking better, and being prepared for the local baseball game, exciting first date, business meeting, or holiday soiree.

Fashion and great style are the ultimate social equalizer. Whether you are sporting a five-hundred-dollar department store suit or a fifty-dollar consignment shop steal, visually selling a polished, pulled-together look is a feat we all crave. But let's face it, more of us have a dime than have a dollar, and those of us with dimes want to look just as good as those with dollars. Great style, just like any skill or talent, is the result of a little effort and study, not affluence and money.

In fact, no matter what our bankbook indicates, I have yet to work with a client or meet a gal who didn't enjoy spending less. The desire for a bargain unifies us all, and there is nothing to be ashamed of. Thrift is a beautiful thing. *Style on a Shoestring* is for every woman who wants to look her best, understand how to fit her body, shop with cunning expertise, organize her closet to optimize every garment, and never spend another dime on a frock that lives only in the closet and doesn't enjoy the glory of being draped on her hot bod.

It is important to recognize that an empowering style can be enjoyed by everyone, not just the skinny-minnies, ladies who lunch, or dames with great gay boyfriends and deep pockets. We all want to look and feel our best, and certain beauty and style principles are universal. A great Cents of Style is all about femininity and delightfully shrewd style, not a trust fund and personal shopper!

Femininity is the greatest power we have. In fact, it is the most powerful thing in the universe, it comes in all shapes and sizes, and best of all, it's *free!*

When you look at the most powerful and influential women throughout time, one common thread is an acute awareness and use of their femininity. Think of Cleopatra; Queen Elizabeth I and II; Yulia Tymoshenko, the most adored and powerful leader in Ukraine and the former Soviet Union; Jacqueline Kennedy; Ann Richards, the former governor of Texas; and Nancy Pelosi, the first female Speaker of the House of Representatives. These women are known for celebrating the distinction of great style and femininity. When you combine strong femininity with thrifty-chic know-how, you are simply unstoppable!

The confidence of shopping wisdom and the sublime understanding of how to rock your form with flair can make you downright drunk with power. (Woo-hoo!) So continue reading at your own risk. You may never get dressed the same way again. Awesome, huh? Let's get started!

In this book, we're going to explore a wide range of thrifty-diva topics. We'll start by discussing the crucial importance of the perfect-fitting bra and other undie wisdom in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 will show you how to find the right fit and style for your body type for everything from pants to tops to the dreaded swimsuit (breathe!). Avoid the most common fashion mistakes, outlined in Chapter 4. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 will serve as your shopping and organization guides. Navigating the sale rack becomes a cinch once you know what to look for and when to look. At this point, you'll want to know how the right colors and the right accessories can instantly update and add value to any

outfit; Chapters 8 and 9 will reveal everything you need to know. In Chapter 10, we'll cover dressing on a budget for a big night out. And in Chapter 11, I'll leave you with some words of wisdom.

Once you've read this book, you'll have the tools to give yourself a complete makeover without breaking the bank. But what can you do right now? And where should you start? Here I've included some of my most basic tips for an instant wardrobe update. You can start to change your look in the morning, right now even. No dough required. Here we go.

FREE! FREE! FREE! FIVE KEYS TO LOOKING FABULOUS THAT DON'T COST A DIME EXTRA

With a wide-eyed understanding that comfort is the sun sign of most of our fashion zodiacs, I want to give you five simple, highly effective tools that will deliver a style boost to anything and everything you wear. These five tools, if used every day, will not in any way affect your budget but will visually elevate what you have on and send a modern message of fashion savvy.

1. You Have to Wear Lipstick Every Day

Yep, step one is lipstick. We all have it, but we forget what an impact it can make. It immediately brightens your face, whitens your teeth, and makes you look younger. Even if the only cosmetic you have on is lipstick, you will easily pull off a more chic, polished look.

As we age, many of us tend to choose darker, muddy colors, and I want you to avoid that. We lose the fullness of our lips over time, and dark lipstick only highlights that loss. Choose your favorite color of lipstick, and move up a shade or two in brightness. A brighter, lighter color will always look more youthful. So c'mon, this one's easy—paint your pucker.

2. Whatever You Have On Must Create Shape Through the Waist

Studies in the laws of attraction and social power have clearly shown that women who have a smaller waist relative to their hips naturally appear more attractive and powerful. This means that if you are hiding under shapeless sweats, boxy blouses, and swing jackets, you are giving all of your feminine power away.

Your tops and jackets *must* contain either shape-creating darts and seaming or a percentage of Lycra or spandex that helps the fabric skim the body. This principle means you need to make sure that your “girls” are sitting high and proud, so your tops and jackets have the chance to enhance your hourglass. There is plenty of bra advice in Chapter 2. This dynamic fashion step will modernize your look in an instant.

3. You Must Wear Cute Shoes

Clunky man shoes are a fashion albatross. With all of the adorable comfy options stacked high on the sale racks, there is just no excuse for sporting clodhoppers. A feminine, col-

orful, even playful shoe speaks volumes about your style and puts a spring in your step.

When choosing shoes, look for a feminine heel and toe, and opt for something that reveals as much of your foot as comfortably possible. This, of course, doesn't apply to boots, but a shoe that reveals more of your foot will make your legs look longer and your outfit more modern. And why not choose a colored or patterned shoe? Adorable leopard flats, gold sandals, or green pumps all tell the world you've got style. So . . . pretty packages for your tootsies are a must.

4. Your Handbag Is Your Social Barometer: Choose Wisely

The days of matching shoes and handbags are over. Today your handbag tells the world who you are, where you are going, and what you need to have when you get there. This single accessory can change the entire mood of your outfit and offers a style boost like none other.

Go for a bold color, and skip the black box with straps. A modern bag should celebrate what you like and not especially what you have on. Don't squander this ripe opportunity to make a big style statement. Push yourself into something bold, and you are sure to seem saucier.

5. You Must Incorporate Something Unexpected into Your Outfit Every Day

Your outfit must include something unexpected, which means you work the juxtaposition of textures, colors, patterns, and the tones of your garments. Building a little

intrigue into your outfit is how you start to build style muscles. Going against the grain and having the courage to do the opposite of what would match or be expected can be both youthful and sophisticated.

For example, you could sport beautiful yellow accessories with a cobalt-blue dress instead of trying to match the blue perfectly or just wearing silver; add a few strands of pearls to your old, worn graphic T-shirt to give it a sophisticated edge; or choose a great walking shoe in red and wear it with everything. These creative expressions add visual interest and spark conversation. Adding a little something askew will reflect an adventurous spirit and will immediately add youthful modern play to everything you wear.

Are you ready to find out more about how to become a full-fledged thrifty diva? I want you to read this book with an understanding that these pages and principles apply to you whether you are a size 2 or 32, you make \$25,000 a year or \$250,000 a year, or you have big boobies or a big bum. I am talking to you. Now, let's start with the basics. Read on to find out about the Cents of Style foundation for a great outfit.