



TAKE NO PRISONERS

End-of-season sales can be fraught with danger so plan your shopping expedition like a military campaign and enjoy the spoils of war, says **Sali Hughes**

1 GO ON SURVEILLANCE

Learn from hardened sale shoppers and try mark-down sharking: spotting an item you love at full-price, then bidding your time during the sales until it hits its lowest price. As soon as you feel that designer handbag is about to become an endangered species, get out the plastic and fire!

2 GO UNDERCOVER

There's nothing more frustrating than trying to imagine a pair of trousers without the VPL or a mini-skirt minus the corned-beef legs. Do your brain a favour and plan your trying-on uniform in advance. Opt for a low-rise G-string, seam-free bra and flesh-coloured stockings. And wear flat, slip-on shoes so you don't waste valuable shopping time retying laces or teetering down the high street in heels.

3 DRAFT IN A COMRADE

Everyone is susceptible to inappropriate buying impulses so take a companion into combat with you. An honest, style-savvy girlfriend – who can offer the ever-useful 'your bum looks like a bag of satsumas in those hot pants, love' commentary – is ideal.

4 SUBMIT TO INTERROGATION

It's easy to get distracted by big, red '75 per cent off' stickers. But before you target the sales desk like a heat-seeking missile, ask yourself whether you would have given those shoes a second glance if they were still £200? A bargain is only a bargain if you wanted it anyway, otherwise you're just throwing money away.

5 FOLLOW REGULATIONS

An item won't magically suit you just because it's marked down. Remember The Rules: no polo necks for the busty, no bias-cut silk for the saddlebagged, however tempting the rock-bottom swing tag is. To avoid losing focus, keep a copy of your personal fashion commandments in your bag to pull out and read whenever you feel your hand hovering near a rail of (shudder) tapered trousers.

6 AVOID MINEFIELDS

Today's must-haves are tomorrow's mustn't-be-seen-dead-ins; precisely

why you should quick-march past the half-price high-heeled flip-flops – they'll be missing in action at the back of your wardrobe by February. You have been warned.

7 STICK TO THE BASICS

If you shouldn't buy trends, what can you buy? Classics and basics. It sounds boring, but sales can arm you with crisp white shirts, boot-cut jeans and cashmere sweaters – all lethal weapons in your fashion arsenal.

8 DON'T EXCEED YOUR RATIONS

Ironically, when everything's cheap we all spend far more than we normally would. To avoid being court-martialled by your bank manager, decide exactly how much you can afford before attacking the shops – and then stick to it. Withdraw your spending limit in cash if you have to: physically handing over money makes you so much more aware of your dwindling bank balance.

9 RESCUE CASUALTIES

No, you don't want a blouse with three buttons and a sleeve missing, but you'd be surprised at the treasures

ILLUSTRATION: JACQUELINE BISSETT



SHOPPING GUIDE

Quick reference for sales shopping without tears

Your figure: boyish

Buy: polo, cowl and crew-neck tops; flared from the waist jackets; calf-length, A-line and pleated skirts; halter-necks; chunky knits; ruffled shirts; backless designs; brightly coloured separates.
Avoid: straight-legged pants; wrap, scoop and V-neck tops; high-waisted trousers; cropped tops; shift dresses; anything double-breasted.

Your figure: pear

Buy: asymmetric or handkerchief hems; slash necks; three-quarter length jackets; flared pants; A-line skirts; dark, boot-cut jeans with bum pockets; matching boots; darker colours for your lower half.
Avoid: high-cut jeans; baggy tops; cropped, boxy jackets; tapered or cropped trousers; side pockets; anything cut on the bias.

Your figure: curvy

Buy: scoop and V-neck tops; tailored jackets; wrap tops and dresses; ruched tops; side-fastening trousers; anything low-waisted; loose-legged trousers; one colour outfits and dresses.
Avoid: horizontal stripes; chunky knits; high-waisted trousers; polo and high-necked tops; elasticated waists; straight skirts; tapered trousers and drainpipes.

Your figure: petite

Buy: boot-cut, floor-length trousers; long-line jackets; shoes that are neutral-coloured or the same colour as trousers or skirts; high heels; simple, draped dresses or anything bias cut.
Avoid: high-waisted skirts and trousers; flat shoes or bulky, mannish boots; baggy sweaters; jackets with large shoulder pads; big prints; trousers with turn-ups.

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to be found in the 'damaged' bins – ex-display items, PR samples and once-worn staff uniforms which are as good as new after a wash. Give your purchase a thorough inspection before handing over cash, as you're unlikely to be able to return it.

10 QUICK MARCH!

A moment's hesitation can be the difference between bagging your dream item and losing it to a more sussed sales shopper. If something catches your eye, grab it and carry it around with you while you make up your mind. You'll avoid a lifetime of the-one-that-got-away remorse.