

In Fashion: Retail therapy for spring

by Sharon_Mosley

We all know that shopping is one of life's greatest pleasures - well, at least for most of us girls. But when a new season rolls around, taking off to the mall is even more fun. There are so many clothes and so little time or money. So, you've got to make time. Take a spring break and get some retail therapy.

Here are some tips from Amy Elliott, a shopping expert and author of "A Girl's Guide to Retail Therapy" (Barnes & Noble, 2006):

- Shop at a department store.

SHOPPING THERAPY - Take a break and get some retail therapy, says Amy Elliott, a shopping expert and author of 'A Girl's Guide to Retail Therapy.' CNS Photo courtesy of T.J. Maxx.

You might be more than entertained, according to Elliot, you might actually find something you'll enjoy buying.

"I would argue that the longer you stay in a department store, the more likely you are to find and purchase things that'll make you smile," she says.

You also stand a good chance of finding something on sale, she adds, and you can scope out the men's department, too.

- Hit a drugstore.

Grab a bunch of ponytail holders. Pick up your favorite box of candy, or a basket full of rainbow-colored office supplies. What do all these items have in common?

"All are bizarrely happy-making," says Elliot, "and are available at your neighborhood drugstore - a place that never fails to stimulate and excite the senses in powerful ways."

- Shop for bedtime.

Don't stay in bed, but get out there and start shopping - for gowns and pajamas that are "elegant, feminine and comforting," says Elliot. "Picture the kind of garments a 1960s-era mother might have packed in her daughter's suitcase before shipping her off to a posh mental hospital in the country."

- Embrace the impulse purchase.

"If you're fixated on a distressing situation or predicament, succumbing to the impulse purchase allows you to re-focus your anxiety," says Elliot. "Instead of your real troubles, you'll obsess over the money you just spent, or on whether or not you were right to go with the size 6 instead of the size 8, or if the Louis Vuitton bag you just bought at a flea market is a cheapo knockoff, not 'vintage' at all."

- Splurge on shoes.

It's one of the best ways to feel good on those "fat and ugly" days.

"Shoes are a unique elixir because they don't discriminate," says Elliot. "You needn't be beautiful, or have a beautiful body to wear them."

- Buy yourself a hat.

Another way to boost your fashion self-esteem.

"At the same time, a hat can be a wonderful disguise," says Elliot, "a sort of socially acceptable and super stylish mask to wear when you're having a bad hair day, have a blemish that needs concealing or you want to shut out the world by seeming unapproachable."

- Buy lipstick.

"A new tube of lipstick, the more glamorous the packaging the better, will always make you feel prettier -

always," says Elliot. "It's a quick, inexpensive fix that improves your overall physical appearance, and consequently, your self-esteem."

- Become a regular at off-price stores and outlet centers.

"At an off-price store, part of the fun is that each item's price tag shows you the original suggested retail price, which can make you feel like a savvy shopper and justify any and all purchases you wish to make on that particular store visit," admits Elliot, who loves finding bargains particularly at TJ Maxx. "As a rule, suburban locations tend to be less picked over."

As for the outlet centers, usually situated near major interstate highways: "These discount shopping meccas have a heady, amusement-park quality that will make you feel like the proverbial kid in a candy store," says Elliot.

- Shop for charity or friends and family.

Shopping for someone other than yourself may be one of the "most healing forms of retail therapy," concludes Elliot.

For an overview of national nonprofit organizations, check out these Web sites: www.give.org and www.charitynavigator.com.

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