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Make your own style statement

Tualatin resident Carly Cais has plenty of ideas for how to make do-it-yourself fashion creative and inexpensive

BY ANGELA WEBBER

The Beaverton Valley Times, Sep 16, 2010, Updated 5.5 hours ago

Show Carly J. Cais an outfit, and she can tell you how much it would cost to make it, and how. The Tualatin craft and fashion blogger is dedicated to “the look for less,” creating new and on-trend looks by restyling old clothes and crafting new ones.

Fashion has always appealed to Cais. Though her academic studies were in film and animation, Cais has even designed and marketed her own line of clothes and accessories. After Cais had a child and settled down to become a full-time



Carly J. Cais models an outfit she made herself.

JAIME VALDEZ / THE TIMES

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mom, all creative pursuits stopped. But as her son grew and she had more time to herself, Cais started sharing her passion once again: through a blog (www.chic-steals.com) that is now her full-time job.

It started with a weekly column on a popular fashion blog, where Cais collected the best deals in fashion for readers. But she soon learned that there was demand for more.

“There seemed to be a need for information about low-cost fashion,” Cais said.

After she published a tutorial detailing how to turn a man’s shirt into a “cute summer dress,” her popularity took off. The project garnered national attention on craft and fashion blogs. And Cais knew where she belonged.

It’s called “up-cycling” or “shopping the closet.” Cais shows women how to turn things they have into things they want, such as the shirt-to-dress or romper idea. It’s fun, she says, but it’s also important.

“When you make something, it has real value to you,” said Cais.

And Cais isn’t alone. Recently and until the early 2000s, crafting was something done with a crochet needle by a grandmother — meaningful, but less than trendy. But the rise of websites like “Etsy” and books such as “Generation T” illustrated the rise of trendy crafting. “Generation T,” for example, is a book aimed at teens, showing dozens of crafts and new outfits that can be made with a T-shirt. The projects are young, hip, sustainable and cheap.

More than a mass-produced product that might be stylish but not personal, fashion that is crafted by your own hand means something to you, Cais said. Plus you spend less, and since you aren’t buying something new, no new products or environmental resources are expended.

Cais also has strong feelings about big-name fashion. She follows the runways closely and has even covered New York fashion week for a national website. But while she dresses to runway style, she makes much of it herself. She doesn’t feel like people need to own the big-name items.



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“The price is the label,” Cais says. Her goal is to empower people to make their own designer items. “I don’t want people to be duped by merchandising,” she said.

Cais spends eight or more hours a day on her blog. She describes herself as a creative person.

“I feel like there are so many ideas in my head busting out,” she said. She has many creative outlets: Art and writing are two. But fashion is another way to share creatively, she said.

“All art tells a story, and fashion is the same.”

Cais designs clothes, and sells some of them in her online store. A few years ago, when living in Hawaii, she had her own clothing and accessories line, but she had to shut it down because of the bad economy. The online store fits her style better anyway, she says.

“I prefer the one-on-one interaction with the customer,” she said. She likes working with someone on what they want and could never work for a huge manufacturer.

Her shop is profitable, she says, though not enough, nor is her blog, to really be considered a “job.” She has started looking for work in film again — she used to work for a casting agency in Hawaii.

“It’s lonely,” she said. She communicates with an online community of readers and other bloggers, and participates in contests and collaborative projects. But all of that is online. A full-time job will give her an opportunity to be around people again.

Once she goes back to work, the blogging will continue, but in a more limited capacity. But Cais will certainly continue living what she preaches:

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Once she goes back to work, the blogging will continue, but in a more limited capacity. But Cais will certainly continue living what she preaches: she even posted her hand-crafted outfit for a job interview on her blog.


Watch a video about Carly’s blog and work, produced by Jaime Valdez and Geoff Pursinger of the Times.

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