



Alligators, Old Mink and New Money: One Woman's Adventures in Vintage Clothing

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Melissa Houtte

Attention shopaholics: here is a book for fashionistas everywhere who view their grandmothers as fashion icons, who know crocodile is the real arm candy, and who never hesitate to throw a little catwalk into their step

Alligators, Old Mink and New Money is a celebration of the clothes that capture our memories and imaginations; that leave their indelible stamp on each of our lives. Narrated by Alison Houtte, a former fashion model who runs the beloved Brooklyn, New York, boutique Hooti Couture -- a shop that Ginia Bellafante of the *New York Times* has toasted as a premier spot for vintage finds -- this book is not only the story of one woman's life in fashion, but also a vintage-shopper's guide that helps readers embrace the idea of seeking out fashion finds from past decades to accent their current wardrobe.

Marrying two of women's favorite pastimes -- shopping and reading -- Alison Houtte uses the merchandise she has bought, worn, or sold as a prism through which she examines everything from the labels we wear to the labels we put on our surroundings. Whether talking about her grandmother's navy blue slip or a creamy white forties alligator purse, Houtte knows that every article of vintage clothing has a story behind it. She uses these items as a springboard to explore such universal topics as relationships, self-image, the bond between mothers and daughters, and that elusive thing called style.

Whether you're a flea market veteran who savors the thrill of the hunt or a couture shopper with a *Vogue* budget, or are simply drawn to the de rigueur world of vintage, **Alligators, Old Mink and New Money** offers a shopping adventure -- through auctions, estate sales, flea markets, and clothing racks all over the world -- to be savored, and inspired by!

Alligators, Old Mink and New Money: One Woman's Adventures in Vintage Clothing Details

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Vintage Clothing Alison Houtte , Melissa Houtte

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Wendy Kendall says

Alligators, Old Mink & New Money
By Alison Houtte & Melissa Houtte

All avid readers delight in good books, but to unexpectedly discover a gem when you're not expecting to is a special treat. I was doing fashion research; yes there is such a thing, and this book I had selected for research turned out to be a delightful read.

This memoir begins with the author's life growing up in Miami. Alison is co-author of her memoir with her sister, who is a journalist. Highlighted from the start is the embarrassment her mother was to Alison and her siblings, because of how her mother dressed. She dressed in vintage, shopping at Goodwill and church rummage sales. The family experiences are precious and full of good natured humor. As her adult life progresses, Alison ends up embracing vintage and even owning her own, famous shop in Brooklyn. Don't you just love irony? Alison's life takes such interesting turns from Miami to Brooklyn.

As she grows up in Miami, she is able to do some modeling. That leads to a surprising opportunity to live and model in Paris. The descriptions of her life in Miami are vibrant, and her descriptions of the modeling life in Paris and later in Europe are exciting and fascinating. The humor intertwined in her reflections on her family life in Miami continues throughout this book of her life's adventures.

After the runway and fashion magazines in Paris, becoming owner of a vintage shop, Hooti Couture aka Hooti's, in Brooklyn is an intriguing turn of events. Reading about her evolution as a small business owner is compelling. And how her knowledge of her product, vintage, grows! She sums up her business philosophy so well, "I'm a little secondhand shop in Brooklyn, but I cater to each client like she's in Bergdorf's. I think the success has come with the service and price points. It's great, fun stuff in a fun environment and we get new merchandise weekly. I buy with love, what I love." And don't let this quote mislead you, she did carry men's vintage as well and had some very loyal male customers.

Getting back to fashion research, there is plenty of good advice, solid designer knowledge, and interesting history for fashion lovers, flea marketers, and thrift store addicts. If you haven't explored vintage before, this book will open a whole new world to you. If you are already a vintage fan, you'll learn even more.

Alison has an eye for style and a keen sense of value, and many tips to pass along. Her business philosophy is simple, "keep it fresh, cheap and chic!"

Thereby hangs a tale

Joanne says

Houtte is a model who then opened a vintage clothing store, so this is a light memoir about both of those careers, all centered on fashion. The illustrations are lovely.

Elizabeth says

Thanks to Sue Barth for recommending this book to me. It is a non-fictional account of a vintage clothing store in Brooklyn. (Sadly, it closed three years ago.) Sue recommended it to me because of my eclectic fashion sense (how sweet). The stories are about having your personal style and owning it. Loving old things and loving new things and mixing them together means you will never see someone wearing the same thing as you! There is also the point of getting to know people well--learning who they are, where they come from, what they like so as to better serve them. I follow this philosophy as a librarian in purveying books and information! This book dovetailed nicely with the fictional STILL ME by JOJO MOYES that I was reading--the main character enjoys a particular vintage shop in New York, Perhaps it was modeled after the one in this book!

Wendi says

This wasn't a bad book, but it wasn't particularly good either. From amazon.com: From Publishers Weekly: For fashion lovers, flea market fanatics and thrift store junkies, this book is the perfect find. Former fashion model Alison Houtte, with the help of her sister, journalist Melissa Houtte, offers an enthusiastic memoir of her family's obsession with fashion, her early days as a model and her second career as owner of Hooti Couture, a Brooklyn boutique specializing in vintage clothing. Houtte's chatty manner and anecdotal storytelling style give the book a quick pace, as she visits country auctions and estate sales looking for the perfect items for her loyal and eclectic clientele.

That part of the book is fun, and truly enthusiastic. It is a fun book to read through and read her adventures. The only problem I had with the book was the weird intertwining of her "intimate" life. Bizarre and random and unnecessary mentions about bad relationships and crazy model behavior, except that she doesn't go into enough detail. It's kind of like this: vintage, Chanel, vintage, modeling days, vintage, vintage, bad boyfriend experience, vintage, vintage, bad choices as a model, vintage, vintage, vintage...

I just kind of wished she had kept just to the tale of being a vintage clothing owner and her adventures as such. She could have mentioned that she was a model once and that would have been fine. She even makes weird mentions about people staring at her for being a former model, or that a former boyfriend just wanted her because she was a model. We don't care. We're reading this book because we want to know more about vintage fashion and being a vintage clothing shop owner!! It kind of felt like name dropping or something, just awkward and weird.

It was fun to read about her personal history with fashion. To me the most fun part was reading about her family history with fashion. And her trips to flea markets and thrift shops, and the really awesome finds she'd stumble upon. That was always cool.

But overall it was a kind of awkward book. Even with her journalist sister helping her write it, it was still awkward writing. meh...if you like fashion or vintage fashion you might enjoy it. It's not that I didn't enjoy it, just that at times it was really awkward.

Phair says

Lots of nice descriptions of vintage clothing, mostly from 30s thru 70s; how she found it, sold it, wore it-all very lovingly presented. Alas no photos! There were a few line drawings that conveyed the essence of the clothing and accessories but I wanted to see more. I was thrilled to see mention of one 50s find that came from a RI store called McCarthy's where I often shopped before it went out of business. Part of the book described her childhood and how the author became a fashion model before opening her vintage boutique. That was also interesting. An appendix gives hints for vintage clothing shoppers from buying strategies to cleaning and repair hints. Brief bibliog. of books on buying & identifying wearable vintage. Too bad the Brooklyn shop closed down in 2015.

Molly Panzer says

This is not a book that I would have ordinarily read, however it was on book a day calendar and sounded interesting! It was.

Becky says

I took this book out of the library predicting (because of the foofy title and cute, trendy cover illustration) that it would be barely-readable fluff. But I was determined to give it a try because I'm a vintage clothing fanatic.

In some respects, I was pleasantly surprised by this book. It's very readable, especially toward the beginning, when the author is talking about her family's history of spending money only on "good" things, even if they were secondhand. Also interesting is the story of how the author became a model. These two threads of the author's past are woven into explanations of her love of vintage clothing and "good" clothing.

Once the book gets into the story of how the author opened and maintained her vintage clothing shop, things get less interesting. At that point, the book seems to become little more than a veiled advertisement for the shop. It's clever advertising, but it wasn't long before I felt taken advantage of.

I liked the book for its lack of snobbery. The author insists that she is not a "collector" of vintage clothing, and has little interest in "museum-quality" pieces. This keeps the book open to as wide an audience as possible. I know quite a bit about how to buy, clean, and wear vintage clothing, but I definitely learned a few things while reading this book. I'm sure a vintage novice will take away lots of good information without feeling overwhelmed or talked-down to. It's clear that the author loves vintage clothing, and wants to share that passion with the reader. It also helps that there's a short, well-organized "how-to" section in the back, to assist newcomers with their first forays into the world of vintage clothing.

I also liked seeing familiar situations and types of people throughout the book -- the "early birds" who always want to be the first ones into an auction or shop, the indecisive shopper who loses out on a great find, the overly-aggressive formerly-indecisive shopper who stalks the buyer of that great find & offers her more & more money for it, the great find that you have to pass up because it's too much money, or the condition isn't very good, or it doesn't fit.

All of this and more will seem very familiar to lovers of vintage and savvy shoppers of all kinds. I wish there

had been even more of that sort of stuff in the book, along with more stuff tying the author's love of vintage back to her days as a model and/or her family stories. Most of the really resonant stuff is in the beginning of the book, whereas the second half is mainly stories about her customers at the shop. Again, great, unique publicity for her shop, but I did feel a little tired of getting an implicit sales pitch while I was reading.

Mizloo says

A quick, entertaining read. part memoir and - larger part - a long advert for her consignment shop. An undemanding book for a lazy afternoon, or in my case de-stressing from a killer day.

Marian M. says

Fun story of a vintage clothing store

I love vintage clothes, so this book by vintage shop owner Alison Houtte was an inside look into her business. Lots of anecdotes about the store, the merchandise and the shoppers.

Pamela Denlinger says

Mildly interesting

The author's personal reminiscences were the best part. Wanted more of these and stories about customers. Couldn't get a close feeling of the author.

Anne says

Anyone who enjoys fashion, clothes and style will love this memoir from Alison Houtte. Alison owns a vintage clothes shop in Brooklyn and had a successful modelling career before that.

From the first chapter I was hooked by Alison's writing style and her personality really comes through well. Each chapter starts with one of her personal anecdotes - about one of her pieces - clothing or accessory that she has found along her travels and either worn herself or sold to a delighted customer in her shop.

Alison writes about her female family members who instilled their love of fine clothes and fashion into her - especially her Mother and her Grandmother. She tells all about her modelling days in Europe and America and how she decided to start her own vintage clothing business, which eventually became the shop 'Hooti'

Alison writes a great story with humour and compassion. Although clothes are the main highlight, she includes stories about her customers, her neighbours, friends and family.

I really enjoyed this book - it's a real find and it made me want to start doing vintage straight away.

Readers should be warned however, that Alison does wear and sell real fur and alligator and crocodile skin

handbags.

Rose Lemberg says

I love old things, tend to like people who love old things, and enjoy reading about both, so this was up my alley.

Barbara says

Interesting subject

Entertaining read especially if you love to wear clothes that reflect your personality! Would love to visit the store on my next trip to NYC

Bethany Heron says

I picked this book up in a vintage store about 5 years ago and only got round to reading it a few days ago as I thought it might help with my dissertation (which is about clothing from the 1960s) I actually managed to read this in about 2 days as the writing style is very easy and casual. Although I was disappointed with the content. As I am very interested in vintage fashion I thought this would be a great insight into the world of vintage stores but the content is completely erratic. The first half of the book was so dull I very nearly stopped reading it completely: the author mainly talks about her childhood and modelling career which in hindsight seems a bit irrelevant except for certain parts where she mentions going to jumble sales with her mother and then later in Paris. The second half of the book focuses on the author opening her own vintage store. This part was moderately interesting but overall I feel like the book had no clear message or focus except from the author rambling on about her own life. The book seemingly jumps from one pointless encounter or experience to another with no real storyline or focus. But the three things that annoyed me most about this book were 1) the authors infuriating references to her 'bad luck with men' which were beyond irrelevant, like she was trying to imitate Carrie Bradshaw, and even references the character at one point in the book 2) the patronising way the author explains certain things or phrases, for example "that's what we would call it in the fashion industry" and 3) the authors evident lack of knowledge about fashion or designers despite being a model and "loving" vintage. I would not recommend this book.

Laurel Kathleen says

Excellent resource for new and experienced vintage shoppers. Author and former model has a unique perspective on fashion, and she explains her evolution with family and industry stories that are incredibly engaging.

"...any one outfit has the potential to be a time-travel machine. I don't want to live in the past, but I don't mind taking on the present swathed in another decade's finery when the mood strikes."
