



Cheap and Chic

Shopping at the Incredibly Inexpensive H&M

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So, like to spend the weekends at Fashion Show Mall, meticulously scouring the racks for the latest designer duds? Now, it's finally time to start mixing in the cheap stuff.

Europe's biggest clothing retailer, the fashionably inexpensive H&M, has long provided ultra-trendy pieces and essential basics to the masses in cities like Stockholm and New York City. Now, those masses include Las Vegas and its visitors, as the clothing giant continues its U.S. expansion with the opening of its first Las Vegas location inside the Miracle Mile Shops at Planet Hollywood Resort and Casino.

"Stores like H&M brought democracy to high fashion," says Robert Verdi, stylist to the stars and fashion reality show host. "'Affordable fashion' isn't taboo anymore the way it was at one time."

Verdi held court at the store's grand opening on October 4, dishing out fashion tips and reigning over gift card giveaways and major discounts on fall items. The famous stylist cites the slew of designers and celebrities who have lent their names to exclusive H&M collections over the years, including fashion icons Stella



McCartney, Karl Lagerfeld and Madonna. McCartney's collection sold out in record numbers in 2005, and Madonna's track suits made loungewear hot last year. A Roberto Cavalli line hits stores this month.

Bite your tongue if you think there's no way that the store can offer the season's hottest looks: Gone are the days when discount clothing was a season behind.

"H&M has the trends on the racks at the same moment that Gucci has the trend on the rack," Verdi says. "Now you don't have to look like last season."

Verdi, who has styled such celebrities as *Desperate Housewives'* Eva Longoria, swears he loves H&M so much that he eagerly stood in line when the U.S.'s flagship New York City store opened on Fifth Avenue back in 2000 — and then dropped \$600. Dressed in a striped polo shirt and graphic hoodie for the opening, Verdi helped customers be "of the moment," suggesting exciting colors, streamlined silhouettes and retro pieces from the '50s, '60s and '70s. "I saw this great dark plum dress with black detail, which sounds like it could be a little *Purple Rain*, but it wasn't," Verdi says. And customers can buy this season's chunky, oversized sweater for as low as \$30.

The 60-year-old Swedish chain now boasts more than 100 stores in the U.S., plus 1,200 posts in 23 other countries. The Las Vegas location offers clothing and accessories for men, women and kids, plus a shoe selection.

"Expanding our brand across the country allows us to offer new styles every day to even more fashion-conscious customers," says Sanna Lindberg, H&M's U.S. country manager.

"I love it when I stop people and ask where they got something, and they say H&M," Verdi says. "You really can get things there for every age. Moms are one of the core groups that talk to me about looking good. They don't want to be in sweat suits all day."

Unless it was designed by Madonna.

Being cheap never felt so good at www.hm.com