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CONTRIBUTORS



CAROLINE PHILLIPS

What exhibition are you most looking forward to? *Raphael* at the National Gallery. I love the simplicity, balance and harmony of his paintings.
Most memorable gig? Elton John and the Beach Boys at an all-day concert at Wembley in 1975. It was *Fun Fun Fun*.

Which artist would you most like to take out for dinner? Edvard Munch to find out what *The Scream* is all about. I'd take him to Burger King, so he'd really

have something to scream about – and a tummy ache.

What do you love most about British culture? Shakespeare's one of ours, the novel was invented here, and we have the rule of law and democracy. What's not to like?



DAVID GOLDMAN

What exhibition are you most looking forward to? I've always been a big fan of David Hockney, so his retrospective at the National Portrait Gallery.
Most memorable gig? The Prodigy in Brighton. I couldn't tell you the exact year, it was the mid-Nineties and it was all a bit of a haze back then. The energy in that gig was insane.

Which artist would you most like to take

out for dinner? The photographer Robert Capa. His pictures are what made me pick up a camera in the first place.

What do you love most about British culture? How we have always punched above our weight across all areas of the arts.



BENJI WILSON

What exhibition are you most looking forward to? JMW Turner at Tate Britain in the autumn. The granddaddy of British abstraction.

Most memorable gig? Arcade Fire at Brixton Academy in 2007. Total euphoria, grown adults in tears, about 50 musicians on stage; I've never seen anything like it since.

Which artist would you most like to take out for dinner? It has to be Prince. Ideally I'd take him to a nice restaurant on Alphabet

Street where we'd have Starfish and Coffee wearing matching Raspberry Berets.

What do you love most about British culture? It doesn't take itself too seriously (most of the time).



SAM KINCHIN-SMITH

What exhibition are you most looking forward to? While the nights are still long I'm going all the way to Copenhagen for the Nick Cave exhibition at the Black Diamond.

Most memorable gig? Sigur Rós at Glastonbury, the day after the Brexit referendum, felt life-savily cathartic.

Which artist would you most like to take out for dinner?

Definitely Maggi Hambling. I would

take her to a Suffolk pub in midwinter, sometime before the smoking ban was introduced.

What do you love most about British culture? Its repressed, dreary, drizzly sense of humour.

Bag a Carrie Bradshaw-style wardrobe by working the sample sale calendar

ELBOWS AT THE READY

Why pay full price for designer clothing ever again?
Caroline Phillips joins the designer sample sale rush

TOP SAMPLE SALE STOPS

Arlettie

Luxury French company new to London. Brands include Dolce & Gabbana and Fendi. Lovely staff and central premises but wear a swimming cozzie as no changing room. Coveted VIP status – when you spend £10,000 a year – offers the richest pickings and civilised VVIP private previews in Fitzrovia and Paris. Or £50 a year buys you VIP access to opening days. arlettie.co.uk

The Music Room

From Hobbs and Reiss to Oscar de la Renta, Monica Vinader, Smythson and Richard James. The first dedicated venue and still a leader. themusicroom.co.uk

The BOX

Worth the schlep to Hackney (a ‘mini-Bicester’ with its Burberry and Nike outlets) for Christopher Kane and A.P.C. Individual changing rooms, decent mirror access and 28-year-old whizz Natalie Yaffe, ex Mr Porter, behind it. thebox-london.com

Showcase

From Temperley to Fabergé, plus many unpublicised, top-end private sales. Communal changing room, £2 entrance fee (for charity). showcase.co

BEST WEBSITES

Chicmi.com

The world’s biggest fashion events site – a guide to everything sartorial in London, NYC, Toronto and LA. There’s a six-month waiting list for its VIP list (£12.99 pcm), which gets you into sale previews and exclusive events. If you pick just one site to follow, this should be it.

aSample.co.uk

Free to join, offers access to London’s sample sales from Rag & Bone to Sophie Hulme with one-hour slots booked online.

ExclusiveSampleSales.com

Sales at 55 Baker Street and town halls. Pringle to Marie-Chantal. Can be a bun fight.

Curate-Sales.com

Invitation-only in London and Manchester. Register online, free. Brands include Victoria Beckham and Phillip Lim.

You can buy a new Jimmy Choo handbag for £130, a Belstaff parka for £150-£600 less than the RRP, or a Roland Mouret coat reduced by 85 per cent to £250. But this bargain world is accessible solely to those in the know. Luxury brands tell only a select few about the dedicated sample sale venues that aren’t in designer outlets and that typically discount by 50 to 75 per cent.

Hermès holds such sales in New York. Ditto Prada, which did its first sample sale this year. Louboutin runs ‘private’ (invite only, via sample sale websites and/or the brand’s press, friends and family databases) sales in central London, but it’s easier for an elephant to wear stilettos than it is to gain access. In November Prada hosted its first (five-day!) London sample sale at The Box, Hackney. Plus Showcase – the Piccadilly sample sale venue – recently staged Jimmy Choo’s first private sale in Birmingham. And Manchester’s joining the party.

The sample sale business is booming. ‘The fashion industry’s in crisis – due to economic gloom, fast fashion and overproduction – and shoppers are reaping the benefits,’ says Jamie Brown, CEO of fashion events website, Chicmi. Katie Holland, founder of Showcase, explains: ‘There’s more excess stock than ever to shift. But big brands don’t want to devalue their name by selling in TK Maxx.’

In London, The Music Room (a 3,800 sq/ft Mayfair event space) pioneered such events a decade ago. The Box started in 2017, followed by Showcase. Now Arlettie – with its designer showroom look – has arrived in Fitzrovia, following 15 years in Paris representing an A-Z of top brands. Plus there are countless pop-ups, serving 1,400 sales annually.

Such sales used to be exclusive, private events for staff, press, friends and family – selling only press samples, prototypes and catwalk pieces. Now the public gets invited (via sample sale websites) and there’s also overstock – former and current season – to snap up.

The events all have their own vibe. At La Perla you’ll find slinky model types trying lacy lingerie (bras for £35) in a communal changing area; the flowery brand Erdem blooms with Holland Park’s yummy mummies; and Hobbs is all elbows and heaving changing room.

Let me give you my insider tips. Be targeted in your shopping and ask yourself whether you’d have bought the item at full price (thereby

avoiding frenzied impulse buys.) The first day of the public sale lures devotees, brand obsessives and sample sale regulars. Go at the beginning for the greatest variety and the end for further discounts. Generally, stock is replenished throughout the sale.

Know your size in the brand and if you miss your favourite label, don’t despair: brands reappear in different venues seasonally. Only a quarter of shoppers are male, heading for Cifonelli suits (reduced from £3,000 to £500, with on-site tailors to do alterations), Paul Smith or Alexander McQueen.

Once you’re part of the sample sale pack you may be invited to private sales, which operate under the radar to preserve the brand’s upmarket image. If you get on a VIP list, you can access sale previews (VVIPs) or first hours (VIPs). Alternatively, sometimes you can book a time slot via a sample sale website (for Anya Hindmarch, say), to avoid the crowds.

Resell if you dare. At one Mulberry event, the brand’s Asian fans were nabbing around eight bags each. Arlettie limits multiple purchases and bars resellers from future sales. Each brand decides on the number of items permitted. ‘Stella McCartney, say, allows only one handbag,’ explains Holland.

The major drawback is that textile production contributes more to climate change than aviation and shipping combined. Obviously it’s better to make do and mend, or rent but at a sample sale you’re shopping a tad more ethically by buying excess and preventing waste. It’s preferable to brands burning unsold garments or sending them to landfill.

What are the other downsides? Queues can be huge, starting at 4am (Lazy Oaf) to four hours long (Monica Vinader), and rarely less than an hour (mid-morning’s often quieter). You need to negotiate crowds, especially for high street brands. Sizes may be limited. You could queue for half an hour to pay. There are no returns, so be eagle-eyed, especially as brands may be shifting lesser-quality samples, tired old stock, returns or even defective items, without flagging this.

I’ve inadvertently purchased two moth holes (plus a jumper) and a designer skirt that slid to my ankles on Regent Street. As for that sample sale ‘cashmere’ dressing gown... it turned out to be 50 per cent merino wool. Oh, and how about when the sales staff got the beachwear brand’s pricing wrong and added another 30 per cent at the till?

But it’s still worth it – for buying quality items in a slightly more ethical way, for less money. Twenty-five years ago I purchased an Hermès jacket and Gucci biker boots in their ‘friends and family’ sales. I’m still wearing them. As price per wear, that works out less than Primark. ■