The New Rise of the Old: Vintage Clothing and Accessories

By Jim Lanier

The vintage industry is booming, and Birmingham is not an exception. But what is vintage? Vintage refers to clothing and accessories originating from any time between the years 1920 to 2000. Think of staples like skateboarders' baggy jeans, hipsters' bell bottoms, shoulder pads, or the grunge of Y2K.

Wes Frazer, co-owner of Mom's Basement, a bar and restaurant that helps host regular vintage markets in Birmingham, believes the definition of "vintage" depends on one's age. "Depends who you're asking," he says. "I'm 47, so vintage to me is [the 1990s] and older. Vintage to the younger folks who shop the market is the 2000s."

Regardless, thanks to nostalgia for the past, vintage has taken the fashion market by storm. According to ThreadUp, an online clothing resale platform, the resale industry is predicted to grow fifteen times faster than the rest of the retail sector. Locally, vintage markets are drawing in thousands. Maddie McQueen from CBS 42 writes, "According to Vintage Market Days [a vendor fair in Hoover, Alabama], around 5,500 to 6,000 people will come through [the market] over the three-day event."



So what are the benefits of buying vintage? Why are people doing it? While vintage markets have specific benefits of their own, many of the upsides come from the *products* they are selling. Vintage clothing and accessories are typically made of higher quality materials, which last significantly longer than clothing made in the modern-day retail industry. Statistically, 70 percent of all vintage items are crafted with superior materials. As one owner of a vintage store said, "You'll probably find that if something made 20 years ago stood the test of time, it will probably last another 20 years … I think it's much better than it is today. Fast fashion churns out crap." Also, vintage clothing provides a way to avoid some of the issues the fast-fashion market has produced. Nowadays, according to Rashmila Maiti, an author with Earth.org, fast fashion is wrecking the environment: fast fashion contributes to roughly 10 percent of global carbon emissions, is the second biggest consumer of water globally, and ultimately, some 85 percent of the textiles used in fast fashion end up in landfills every year. As Wes Frazer says, "From an environmental viewpoint, vintage is the best way to acquire clothing that doesn't harm the Earth. You're most likely getting a better-quality item as well."

There are also benefits based on *where* you get vintage clothes and accessories. By shopping in vintage markets, you can support local small businesses. As Vintage Market Days promoter

Kimberly Denard says, “For a lot of these vendors, this is all they do; they travel around the nation market to market. This is how they make their living.”

Why are people *actually* shopping vintage? The numbers show an increase in vintage shopping, but do people really care about the environmental impact? The answer seems to be *yes;* the environment is a factor. In one survey from an online marketplace for secondhand clothes, 75 percent of participants claimed reducing clothing consumption as a reason for shopping second hand, and over half cited environmental and social factors.

There are many ways to shop for vintage clothing, but one of the most popular and accessible options is through online marketplaces. While online marketplaces, such as Depop and Ebay, are accessible options, one can also find vintage clothing at local shops and markets. By going to local vintage shops you not only have a hands-on experience, but also support your community.

If you are looking for a local curated vintage store, you could go to Magic City Mercantile. Another option is Mom’s Vintage Market, which holds monthly events at different locations that can be found on their Instagram.