



Abeer Kobeissi / Beirut Vintage Bazaar



Depot-Vente's Nawal Akl

In with the old

In Beirut, vintage clothing may finally be getting its moment. As doors open to Depot-Vente and Beirut Vintage Bazaar, two boutique owners tell *TOB* why new clothes are so last year

There's no glittering shop front or nearly-new Elie Saab gown in the window, but on the first floor of an unremarkable building in Mar Mikhael, a sign hangs by the door: 'Here you are!'

On this Friday afternoon, Nawal Akl invites me into the shadowy apartment where dresses and coats hang from every inch of space, a carpet of shoes covering the floor. A bottle of wine sits open by a day bed, the only free space a narrow pathway. What looks like an eccentric old tante's house is actually Beirut's newest vintage boutique, Depot-Vente.

Nawal opened the boutique in April, but not because she saw a lucrative business opportunity. In fact, when I ask if there's an increasing demand for truly vintage clothing – produced 25 years ago or more – she confesses,

'I can't say because I really don't know.' Depot-Vente came about simply because Nawal's home had grown too small for her own vintage collection; now she's selling most of her decades-old wardrobe for between LL10,000 and LL20,000. The shop's Holy Grail is a rack hanging from the ceiling, as if suspended from the heavens. 'Everything up there is important to me,' Nawal explains before stating her policy: one item from that particular rack can be sold per month, no exceptions, and even then the customer must pass her test. 'It all depends on the girl – if she's enthusiastic.

There are people who are willing to pay anything, but I only sell to real vintage lovers.'

At Depot-Vente, you won't find the two-seasons-old designer jackets or mid-'90's couture dresses that crop up in some of the

city's other 'vintage' shops. Most items in the boutique were bought directly from older women in the city, and appear to be casual pieces from the '60s, '70s and '80s. But Nawal says she doesn't fuss over historical details: 'Most of my clothes come from ladies who don't even remember the history of their own clothes.' She points up to a sheer panel decorated with feathers. 'This came from a woman who had no idea how it got in her closet and was convinced it was a curtain.' Nawal lifts both ends of fabric to reveal that they're joined – the mystery piece is a maxi-skirt with a dramatic train.

While Nawal focuses little on where a piece came from, for others that's part of its charm. 'You'll never find two identical pieces when it comes to vintage clothing,' says Abeer Kobeissi, founder of the pop-up shop Beirut Vintage Bazaar. 'Everything has its story, which is what makes it special.' Abeer's previous job at an airline took her around the world, where she would collect clothing and other knickknacks from local

flea markets and resell them in Beirut. She has plans to open a permanent store this summer, but for now she's keeping the details under wraps.

Some of her clients crave styles from eras past, but for others it's a matter of practicality, or even morality.

Abeer reasons that buying used clothing is conscious consumerism, and like Depot-Vente, Vintage Bazaar is affordable: pieces are priced at LL5,000 and up, with a cap around \$200 for truly exceptional pieces.

'The fabric, cut and quality of clothing has really changed over time,' Abeer explains. 'For LL69,000, you can buy several old, beautiful silk shirts. Or for the same price, you can buy a trendy polyester shirt that you'll end up cleaning your glass with one year from now.' When the question is between old and new, Abeer says there's no contest: 'Really, an intelligent person will buy vintage.'

Depot-Vente (03 200620) Badawi Str, Mar Mikhael, Beirut. Facebook page: Depot-Vente Beirut Vintage Bazaar (70 922 520). www.beirutvintagebazaar.com. Facebook page: Beirut Vintage Bazaar



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Swimming in history: Suit from Beirut Vintage Bazaar