

Former cruise ship performer offers fashion fun and neighborly guidance to her consignment shop customers

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Jane Willson once sang and danced on cruise ships, dressing in glamorous outfits, including ones once worn by â??Dynastyâ?• star Joan Collins. She had a ball, she said. Since 2001, she has also had a ball helping others experience the fun and joy of style and fashion.

Her Clement Street shop, JANE Consignment, is more than a clothing and accessories shop. Sheâ??s made it into a community where people shopping for pre-worn couture can also get fashion advice and guidance.

Working alone, she spends as much time as she can getting to know the desires, needs and tastes of her customers, mainly women but a few men. â??I love dressing women to make them feel special.â?• One of her favorite things is to share the history of different pieces of the outfits she creates for customers.

She starts by asking for color and style preferences and takes it from there. â??Youâ??d be surprised how many women donâ??t like to shop and welcome suggestions.â?• Some women drop by every other day to see whatâ??s new, and some come in once a year for a total wardrobe makeover.



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> â??I guess you can say Iâ??m a fashion stylist, confidant and motivator all rolled into one. I always say, this store is not about need, itâ??s about fun!â?•
> *JANE WILLSON*

Originally from Kansas, Willson said she has two rules for customers: She doesnâ??t want to hear the â??F-wordâ?• or the â??O-word.â?• Sheâ??s referring to â??fatâ?• and â??old.â?• Negative self-talk is inhibiting, she said. â??I encourage women to explore a new style or add a fresh look to the style theyâ??re most comfortable with.â?•

She studied theater in college in the early â??80s, then moved to Los Angeles to pursue a career as an actor and singer. She spent Saturdays with friends looking for great deals at yard sales. â??Iâ??ve always loved the thrill of treasure hunting. Itâ??s so much fun and continues to be as I turned my hobby into a career.â?•

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Long ago, clothing was not resold. People patched things up or used the fabric for something else. But demand for clothing from an immigration surge in the late 19h century was met by the introduction of mass production during the Industrial Revolution. As new clothing flooded the market, so did clothing people no longer wore.

Stigma of used clothes finally faded

The Salvation Army began offering people food and lodging in return for used clothing. In the 1920s, Goodwill began collecting trucks of clothing and housewares and offering them for resale. Within 10 years, Goodwill had 100 stores across the country, according to â??From Goodwill to Grunge: A History of Secondhand Styles and Alternative Economies.â?• What had once been called junk shops became thrift shops.

Willson believes the stigma of pre-owned fell away completely about 10 years ago, but said, â??I still have to explain the difference between consignment and thrift.â?• Consignment tends to be higher-end clothing, curated with a discerning eye. â??Consignment is truly win-win. The consignor receives a return on their gently used clothing and the customer receives high quality fashion at a fraction of retail.â?•

The resale industry in the U.S. includes about 20,000 stores with combined annual revenue of about $17.5 billion. That includes furniture and other non-clothing items, according to a March report by Dun & Bradstreetâ??s research division. The National Association of Resale Professionals puts the figures at 24,000 and $24 billion.

With a diverse clientele aged 15 to 95, JANE Consignment offers an eclectic range of styles. â??I love couture, but I appreciate the beauty in many brands, and those from different eras and cultures.â?• She carries some vintage clothing from the â??40s and â??50s, and retro clothing from the â??60s through the â??80s, but most of the inventory is contemporary.

â??I believe in offering a variety of styles in a wide range of sizes for different budgets.â?• In addition to consignment pieces, the store also showcases jewelry from local designers and new items such as

cashmere scarves, novelty socks and colorful umbrellas.

Dresses worn by Joan Collins and Linda Evans

Her interest in fashion was fed in part by the path of her entertainment career in Los Angeles. As a featured singer on the Princess Cruise Line, she traveled to Australia, South East Asia, China, Japan and Russia. â??That experience was very helpful when I opened my store in the diverse Richmond district of San Francisco.â?•



Jane Willson, as a cruise line entertainer. Some of her outfits had been worn by Joan Collins and Linda Evans on the popular â??80s TV series â??Dynasty.â?• (Photos courtesy of Jane

Willson)



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Fashion reigned on ship and onshore. â??Entertainment on the cruises meant lots of sequined gowns, wigs and fishnets. I had six costume changes within an hour,â?• she said. On her first cruise, fashion and jewelry designer Nolan Miller, best known for his costumes on the TV series â??Dynasty, asked her to model dresses worn by stars Joan Collins and Linda Evans. â??It was a thrill.â?•



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After three yearsâ?? working onboard ships, Willson was offered an opportunity in sales and decided to put entertainment on the back burner. â??I shed a lot of tears over that decision. I have friends in L.A. from that time who did very well in the business. Sometimes, I get nostalgic.â?•

But she excelled in sales, working for different companies all over the country as a trainer, executive training manager. â??All the jobs Iâ??ve had have helped me in my current position, sometimes by clarifying what I wouldnâ??t do. I wanted to develop long-term relationships then, as I do now. I was kind and honest with everyone.â?•

Having been in the Richmond

neighborhood for 18 years, she has watched many customersâ?? children grow up and start their own families. One of her favorite stories is when a woman stepped through the door holding a toddler. She reminded Willson that a few years before, she had helped her find a beautiful dress for a very special date. Nodding to the child in her arms her customer said, â??The dress was a huge success!â?•

Itâ??s this sense of community that drives her operation. â??I love my work because itâ??s different every day and I get to meet so many interesting people from all backgrounds and from all ages.â?• One of her favorite things is to watch three generations of women come in together and â??all find something they love.â?•

> Willsonâ??s philosophy for dressing is somewhat akin to Marie Kondoâ??s advice on what to keep when decluttering: â??Dress for joy â?? what makes your heart sing.â?• She has found that when people put thought into what theyâ??re wearing, they feel better. â??Itâ??s an emotional connection, and we have more confidence when weâ??re wearing something we love.â?•
> *Jane Willson*

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Dressing customers for special occasions

A big part of the fun for Willson is putting together outfits for special occasions, and in San Francisco, she said, â??thereâ??s always something going on.â?• She has helped customers put together outfits for costume parties, weddings, sweet-sixteen celebrations, birthday and retirement parties â?? even funerals. â??I think Iâ??ve dressed over 100 people for Gatsby parties.â?• She also boasts a good record of finding the right outfit for job interviews. â??Many times customers come back and tell me they got the job.â?•

After moving to San Francisco to work for a leadership training company and recalling her love of thrift shopping, Willson began thinking about owning a consignment store. â??I thought I might talk to an owner and shadow them around for a while to see how the business worked.â?•

She learned that Heatherâ??s Consignment Boutique, where JANE Consignment is now located, was closed and for sale. She slipped a note through the mail slot. She also put a post on CraigsList seeking to buy an existing store. Heather saw it. â??Eventually she would have found the note, but it was serendipitous that she saw my post,â?• she said.

Willson bought the store and with it came three valuable things: a mailing list, fixtures and a bustling location. Many things have changed over the years: She remodeled the store. The mailing list became an email list. New arrivals are frequently posted on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Although she keeps up with the latest clothing trends, the â??fast fashionâ?• trend of the 2000s â?? the quick turnover of designs from the catwalk to retail â?? motivated her to begin buying higher end clothing. â??A friend and I used to call that â??disposable clothing.â?? Thereâ??s not a lot of quality in the medium price range.â?•

One benefit of higher-end used clothing is its durability, Willson said. But a benefit of buying used clothing in general is a reduction in â??the colossal amount of textiles that end up in landfills.â?• With customersâ?? consent, she donates clothing not purchased to local organizations for those in need.

â??I am amazed Iâ??ve been here 18 years,â?• said Willson, now in her late 50s. But she sees a long relationship ahead. â??Itâ??s very rewarding to see the smile on someoneâ??s face as they leave the store with their new treasures.â?•

Willson reviews clothing for consignment by appointment. Store hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 12ish to 7ish.

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1. All Posts

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