

I Have Nothing to Wear!

Browse through Christabelle's Closet where you can look like a million without spending one.

Christina Carathanassis

Rhode Island '94

It's Monday and you need a fabulous dress to wear to a party Saturday night. The rest of the week is booked solid with meetings, family commitments and a passel of pesky errands. When will you ever find time to shop? And where will you ever find the perfect dress? Stress no longer, sisters. Christabelle's Closet is wide open!



Christabelle's Closet was featured in the September 2004 issue of O, The Oprah Magazine, as one of the seven best places to shop on the web. Christina's site has also received positive press in The Wall Street Journal and on the Discovery Channel's B Smith Style.

Christabelle's Closet, www.christabellescloset.com, the brainchild of Christina Carathanassis, Rhode Island '94, offers luxurious, one-stop shopping where women and men from across the United States and Canada can find authentic, top-designer clothing, shoes, handbags and much more for a fraction of the retail cost. Each item is lovingly chosen by Christina and her fellow fashionistas (dedicated followers of fashion who have an impeccable eye for the latest trends and styles).

"We operate as a high-end boutique, and our shoppers know they are receiving authentic, gorgeous items," said Christina, whose patrons receive their purchases wrapped in Christabelle's signature pink tissue paper, along with a complementary pink sachet perfect for tucking into a drawer or closet. "We are extremely customer service oriented. We want our shoppers to feel like they are in their girlfriend's closet. We aim for a personal experience, not a 'you are just our customer code' experience. People appreciate the one-on-one attention they receive from our site, as well as the fabulous finds, which has brought us a very high return shopper rate."

In any given month, 25,000 fashion mavens visit Christabelle's Closet, a number that is growing with the newly opened Classy Kids, men's, and women's plus-size designer clothing sections. Plans are in the works for a maternity section later this year.

It's a given that Christabelle's Closet offers quality merchandise at lower-than-retail prices. If you're looking for an even greater bargain, visit Christabelle's Clearance Closet. Half of the revenue generated from the sales in this part of the closet is donated to the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research. This cause is close to Christina's heart as her mother is afflicted with this debilitating disease.

The majority of items in Christabelle's Closet are offered on consignment from a confidential list of consignors who range from high-level executives and socialites to the woman next door. Christabelle's Closet is further enhanced by items Christina finds at industry events such as sample sales or designer blowout sales. By tapping into these sources, Christina is able to offer exceptional items to people who might not have access to such insider venues.

"Fashion seems to bring joy and smiles to so many," said Christina. "I want to make sure people everywhere have equal opportunity to look as though they shop on Fifth Avenue, even if they live nowhere near Manhattan."

Phenomenal Foundation

As a little girl, Christina's mother affectionately gave her the name Christabelle, and through the years, Christina's friends picked up the moniker as well. "Since my mom is the reason for my love of clothing, shoes and all the finer things in life, there was really no other choice of names for the company than Christabelle's Closet," said Christina. "With the combination of my father's entrepreneurial spirit, business know-how and drive for success, and my mother's sense of style, brain power, insatiable thirst for knowledge and creative flair—let's just say I have some phenomenal DNA as a foundation!"

Prior to launching *Christabellescloset.com* in 2004, Christina spent eight years as a publicist for numerous clients, starting with consumer goods (including fashion) and ending with prestige cosmetics. As a publicist, Christina had extensive exposure to celebrity events, movie sets and Hollywood happenings. During these heady times, Christina could be found at celebrity-driven events such as the Emmy Awards and the Screen Actor's Guild Awards, as well as backstage with top designers during Fashion Week in New York City.

It was also during this time that a number of people hired Christina to be their personal shopper because they recognized her incomparable taste in fashion. "It's truly flattering to have someone trust your opinion so much that they hand over their credit card and then tell everyone how savvy their stylist is!" she said. "Experiences like these moved me to realize the potential I had in this arena and motivated me to start offering this type of service to those outside my circle of friends."

No matter what your size, taste, or budget, there's something for everyone in Christabelle's Closet. "That was the whole thought process behind starting the boutique," said Christina. "Our pricing and wide selection offers everyone a choice, whether it's a teen on a limited budget, someone just starting a career, a mom at home who doesn't have time to shop, or pure fashionista divas who want designer everything! No one needs to know where you shopped, what you paid, or how you acquired your beautiful items. People will just think you look fabulous. And who doesn't want to feel confident in their purchases?"

Given her clientele and the sources from which she receives her goods, there have been several memorable items to hit the closet, such as the Tom Ford for Yves Saint Laurent Mombassa handbag, which was recently rated a collector's piece. "The item lasted about two hours on the site before being scooped up, much to the dismay of many of my customers," said Christina. Numerous Hermes items have made their way to Christabelle's Closet, as well as Manolo Blahnik and Jimmy Choo shoes for those *Sex and the City* wannabes.

"I encourage my shoppers to buy items when they see them, because chances are, someone is right behind them in the virtual line, waiting to get their hands on the same item. Ninety-nine percent of the time we have but one of each item, and when it's sold, it's gone."

Sisterly Support

Christabelle's Closet is operated by Christina and a bevy of volunteers and freelancers in a New York City office. While a brick and mortar store does not yet exist, Christina said that the business plan wheels are turning.

"Many of my volunteers are my dear sisters from Alpha Xi Delta," said Christina. "While living on campus, my closet became the one



At www.christabellescloset.com, you can click on any fashionista and learn who she is and how she is connected to Christabelle.

that everyone shopped—so much so that when I decided to put this business in motion, many of my sisters said, 'It's about time! We've been waiting since college to get back into your closet!'"

As a collegian, Christina served as the president of Beta Upsilon Chapter. "I will forever be indebted for the opportunity I was given to learn the precious values of responsibility, loyalty and devotion to what you love and believe in—not to mention the unbelievable friendships and bonds of sisterhood that still are as strong as ever. I remind myself every day just how lucky I am. When a bad day shows its ugly head, I always know my sisters are at my side cheering me on and pushing me forward. I would like to say they always dust my pants off when I fall, but somehow they always seem to catch me before I hit the ground."

"Alpha Xi Delta taught me how to be a woman in business, and that we can do anything we put our minds to," continued Christina. "The strength and structure our sisterhood offers young women is one that I have not experienced anywhere else. The constant support, encouragement and resources I had (and still have) at my fingertips can carry no price tag."

As 2005 progresses, Christina will continue to work as hard as ever to bring the best quality merchandise to her customers. "Oftentimes, there is a stigma attached to purchasing items that are 'preloved' or that are seen in a preowned shop," said Christina. "The anonymity of being online extinguishes that notion completely. We hope to continue the upward momentum of the site, as well as make it possible to double the money we donate to the Michael J. Fox Foundation. And, of course, there will be more TV spots, more articles and a TON more shopping!"

Connect with Christina at christina@christabellescloset.com.

Your Turn

Have you shopped Christabelle's Closet? How have Christina's words inspired you? Send your comments to jemerick@alphaxidelta.org, and they may be used in a future issue.

"An online store is open 24 hours a day. You can have a love affair with Gucci and Prada at 3:00 a.m. if you want to."