

Secret Store

No. 6, a hidden gem in downtown Manhattan

by Suleman Anaya/photography Kevin Trageser



How does an unassuming store on an off-beaten street become a treasured address among the chicest women in New York—a loyal group of models, indie actresses and stylists who talk about it in the excited, secretive tones normally reserved for beloved boutiques in Portofino or Antwerp? That is the enviable status quietly attained by No. 6, a women's clothing shop that opened two years ago on a charming, one-block street in downtown Manhattan's Little Italy neighborhood.

It could have something to do with the boutique's relaxed yet glamorous atmosphere: Walk into No. 6 on any given afternoon and you're likely to find it packed with visibly happy women (including the aforementioned models) in various states of undress, trying on and trading pieces as though they were hanging out at a fashionista's walk-in closet. (Not to worry, there are dressing rooms for the more modest.)

The friendly insouciance extends to the helpful, attitude-free presence of the owners, Morgan Yakus and Karin Bereson. A professional vintage collector and stylist respectively, the duo runs the place like a salon, albeit a very inclusive one. They encourage guests to linger and gossip while dispensing expert advice until a perfect piece or outfit is found. Add to it the airy, inviting space (an ever-changing mix of fashionably rough touches and comfortably modern furniture) and you almost have the recipe that makes No. 6 a sparkling gem in this town's overcrowded shopping landscape.

Of course, the most charming location, personalized service, winning interior and coolest ambiance wouldn't warrant all the devotion if the wares themselves weren't at least as compelling. And here is where No. 6 excels. The boutique stocks vintage and new items that reflect the discerning eye, personal taste and long-honed connoisseurship of the store's owners. With a specialty in dresses, the vintage offerings range from delicate Victorian frocks to colorful '80s blouses.

Each piece is individually selected and conforms to Yakus' and Bereson's own refined aesthetic: mildly bohemian and casually modern, with a weakness for good prints. In fact, only a fraction of No. 6's impressive trove is on display: the partners keep the rest (which includes special pieces by Alaïa, Yves Saint Laurent and Giorgio di Sant'Angelo) stored at an off-site, by-appointment-only location. (They are, however, known to bring out the big guns, accordingly priced, for the right customer.)

Unlike other famous vintage stores that encourage buyers to lock away and preserve garments like an old master painting, Yakus and Bereson want their clothes to be wearable and worn. Indeed, a customer can walk out wearing a newly-acquired little summer dress for under \$200.

Offsetting the graphic colors of the vintage designs, black dominates the selection of pieces by contemporary designers, which showcases sought-after and underground European names such as Stephan Schneider, Christian Wijnants, Burfitt and Stine Goya, among others. The seemingly incongruous pairing of old and avant-garde works well: it's not unusual for customers to buy both a bold vintage top and a cutting-edge new piece.

Naturally, for such a lovingly stocked boutique, well-chosen accessories complement the clothes. They include one-of-a-kind jewelry, belts, scarves, shoes and custom-made boots from the eponymous in-house line, an insider's favorite.

As a sign of No. 6's intimate and artistic spirit, the store's latest project is the only thing that isn't wearable: a series of limited-edition books by artist friends, including one that features drawings by musician and Lagerfeld-protégé Devendra Banhart. Could a No. 6 perfume be far behind?

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