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SHOPPING
SPECIAL

MARY-
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OLSEN

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it was. Only one left, down from \$1,900 to \$950. My husband called to see how the writing was going. "Er... great!" I lied, halfway into the dress. I had no idea when I would need a full-length Oscar-worthy evening dress, but that was irrelevant. I had to have it. (My agent threw a big dinner for me a few months later, and I wore it. And, yes, I was a tad overdressed. And, no, I didn't care.)

Looking back over great shopping moments is like looking back over love affairs. The Burberry Prorsum coat, which I'd spotted on Kate Moss in a magazine, was reserved and waited for patiently until at last we were united. It was a civilized moment. Glasses of champagne were on hand; it was grown-up shopping at its most luxurious. At the other extreme is the vastly reduced Prada skirt that I clutched in my sweaty, triumphant hand after an hour's slog through the racks at the discount store Century 21 in Manhattan. Ah, the joy of a bargain! No less special, just a different thrill. Another joy: finding the things you never knew you needed. Anthropologie is my personal heaven for this; the day I found a whole rack of old-fashioned aprons was sheer bliss. I bought 20 on the spot for my publishers and agents to celebrate my novel *The Undomestic Goddess*.

The best, most jaw-dropping shops are experiences in themselves; they're inspirational pieces of theater. The Nordiska Galleriet in Stockholm, which makes you want to fill your home with odd-shaped experimental chairs. The entrance to FAO Schwarz on Fifth Avenue. The vast temple of Armani in Milan, where surely if you buy enough stuff, you too will become impossibly understated, chic, and Italian? Maybe not. (My most surprising hit: Armani Dolci chocolates. Perfect after a dinner party.)

I shop wherever I travel. I see it as an essential part of any trip. Some travelers might regard endless shopping as a waste of time or even shallow; I call it Proustian. I smell the sweet-scented soaps in my bathroom and am instantly transported back to the Aix en Provence market where I bought them... and a quilt... and those four print dresses I really must wear sometime.

We shop because we're worth it—because

The Shopping Expert's Secret Address Book

Luxurious cashmere: Loro Piana for its incredible four-ply sweaters and over-the-top chinchilla blankets. loropiana.com.

Sexiest lingerie: Catriona MacKechnie in New York's meatpacking district. The haute-couture-like sets take undergarments to a new level. catrionamackechnie.com.

Major vintage finds: Hightail it to Keni Valenti Retro-Couture in New York and Decades Two in Los Angeles for some of the best designer pieces. kenivalenti.com; decadestwo.com.

Divine linens: D. Porthault. Check out the 600-thread-count sheet sets. dporthault.fr.

Bespoke stationery: New York's

Mrs. John L. Strong was the American stationer for the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. mrsstrong.com.

Best hostess gifts: We love the mirrored wastebaskets from William-Wayne & Co. and monogrammed items that people often forget to buy for themselves but love to receive. william-wayne.com; themonogramshops.com.



Guia La Bruna chemise, \$490. catrionamackechnie.com.



Decades Two in L.A.

we deserve it. While I was working on a screenplay with Hollywood producer Lynda Obst, we developed a "celebratory spree" habit. After every successful pitch or draft, we would high-five it and zoom to Marc Jacobs on Melrose as fast as we could for a joyous "well done, us" experience. Maybe two guys would have gone for a drink or to a ball game; maybe they would have spent a tad less money. But then, they don't have the fabulous purses to show for it.

I am addicted. Not to the point of hiding bank bills under the bed and running from bailiffs, thank God, but I do need the shops. I need that fix, that sense of achievement. Call me a shopaholic; so are most of the women I know, to some degree. It must be in our genetic makeup: the need to better our surroundings, to prettify ourselves, to stock up. (A great term, "stock up." It sounds so prudent and farsighted: "I'll just stock up on some of these Missoni wedges. It wouldn't do to run out...")

People claim to loathe shopping, to be bored by shopping, to find it a chore. They're doing it all wrong, obviously. To quote Joan Collins: "Anybody who says money can't buy you happiness doesn't know where to shop." Or these days, *how* to shop.

Today's retailers are thoughtful, imaginative partners. They want to make it easy and are getting ever more creative. You don't even need to hit the mall. Shop from the best Web sites (Net-a-Porter and the White Company are two favorites), and a few days later you'll receive a beautiful box, like a present. Air-travel shopping opportunities are developing by leaps and bounds: At Heathrow last week, I bought a DKNY bag for my sister's birthday, tax free. I left it at the airport and went to Sweden, and it was waiting on my return. Then, on the plane, while browsing the in-flight magazine, I just happened to notice a Lulu Guinness "Shop Till You Drop" purse. What better accessory for publicizing my latest book, *Shopaholic & Baby*?

I'll never stop shopping; I'll never feel guilty about it or stop taking joy in it. Why should I? With every spree, I'm giving myself a mood-enhancing buzz, I'm boosting the world's economy... and I'm getting all this gorgeous stuff. Really, what's not to love? ■



Mrs. John L. Strong stationery, price upon request. 212-838-3775.