



Sling cleaning Zhou suggests a ruthless approach to barely worn items lurking in your wardrobe.

Shopping

CHRISTINE ZHOU

The stylist

Christine Zhou is a Shanghai-based image consultant and personal shopper. She set up her own business, Image Secret, in January last year.

The situation

Selena: Our burgeoning wardrobe of cheap clobber hasn't been pruned in over a year and is threatening to take over an entire room. Despite the huge array, we still struggle to put outfits together and more often than not end up wearing the same scruffy combination of skinny jeans, oversized jumper and ballet flats.

The drill

So that Zhou can get a rough idea of our personal style, the session begins with us picking out our go-to outfit for each of the following categories: party, work, leisure and homework. She then produces five A4 sheets of paper labeled 'No longer like'; 'No longer fits'; 'Do not have occasion to wear'; 'Currently wear' and 'Like but had forgotten exists'. She lays them out on the floor and asks us to divide our entire wardrobe – including shoes, bags and jewellery. It's much harder than it sounds, and the mounting heaps of clothes send us into a slight panic.

The process takes around 45 minutes, although this will vary depending on the size of your wardrobe (for larger wardrobes,

Zhou recommends splitting auditing sessions in two – one for spring/summer and another for autumn/winter). The 'No longer like' and 'Do not have occasion to wear' clothes are relegated to bin liners, before Zhou goes through each of the remaining piles garment by garment with a critical eye, assessing condition as well as suitability of colour and cut for our body type.

With our classic pear shape – hips wider than shoulders, with a long torso and short legs – certain styles are a complete no-no and Zhou pulls no punches in identifying them: flowing trapeze tops 'hide a slim waist and flat stomach'; cuffed or cropped trousers 'emphasise short legs' and V-necklines 'do nothing for small chests'. Onto the rejects pile they go, along with anything in bobbly or faded fabric, which can't be rectified by a dry cleaner or tailor. If we're really attached to a blacklisted item, we're allowed to keep it for 'homewear' or 'holiday wear'.

We create a second pile entitled 'Fix', for clothes which pass the style test but require simple repairs (suede patches over worn jumper elbows, replacing missing buttons etc), alterations (taking up mid-calf dress hems to a more flattering knee length)

or copying in a better colour for us (warm tones such as reds, yellows and golds).

Once that's done, Zhou compares our pared-back wardrobe to her list of 'essential basics' to identify any gaps. It turns out we lack only one key clothing item – a little black dress – but are severely deficient in wide belts (to help break up our long torso and add interest to plain dresses), high heels (to lengthen our stumpy pins) and statement jewellery.

Finally, Zhou styles us in three different outfits – glamorous, workday and leisure – using combinations of clothes we haven't tried before. We're not convinced these looks would set the catwalk alight, but there's no doubt that they play to our body strengths and more importantly look smart, grown-up and pulled-together.

Top tips

Zhou says: Arrange your wardrobe by colours of the rainbow first and then by clothes type within each colour – it makes it easier to mix and match separates. Always use wide wooden or plastic hangers, never thin wire ones which put a strain on seams and can stretch clothes out of shape. If you're unsure whether you still like a garment, put it in a labelled box

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for two seasons – if you don't miss it, you'll probably never wear it again.

Best for

Indecisive types who need a ruthless hand in paring back overflowing closets; people who are unsure how to dress for their particular body type; corporate workers looking for a smart, classic capsule wardrobe.

Christine Zhou can be found at www.imagesecret.com or 6103 7037. A complete wardrobe audit costs 1,500RMB/hour and takes around two-three hours.

Give it away

Three of the best places to send unwanted clothes

River of Hearts

This Community Centre Shanghai-organised charity programme accepts clothing, toys and furniture donations, which are distributed to communities around China. For drop-off locations, visit <http://riverofhearts.org>.

Shanghai Closet Swap

Organised by vintage boutique William the Beekeeper, this biannual swap party is an all-day event with music, refreshments and pop-up shops. The next swap is slated for May: email info@williamthebeekeeper.com for details.

Online auction sites

Popular options with sections for secondhand clothing sales include Tozao.com, Ganji.com and Baixing.com.