

Title:

Chapeau Noir...Cheap Chic Travels!

Word Count:

1470

Summary:

The fabulous life of a vintage chapeau noir, a black hat the size of Texas... with the style of Paris, is chronicled by its owner, Trish Rubin. In 36 hours, the hat conquers Paris, leaving its owner in its breathless wake.

Keywords:

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Article Body:

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You've got a favorite photo from your last vacation, right?

Mine is of moi in Paris on the Champs Elysee. I'm posed at the edge of boredom. After all, I am an American in Paris, and can't look too exited.

Looming large in the photo behind me is the famous Louis Vutton store. Ladies, you know what I'm talking about. Gentlemen, if you don't, you are better off not knowing. This knowledge will cost you.

The Louis store is a temple to designer excess, fashioned as a towering classic leather trunk bag. It has a Land of the Giants feel, and, "the little people" with deep pockets enter this palace of style, awed by its scale and grandeur. The French have built it, and people come. And people buy. Thousands of euros per day are spent there even in the face of a declining dollar by style conscious Americans in Paris like moi.

But I didn't spend. Instead I had my picture snapped in front of the faux leather facade. Me, the queen of faux, I am standing tall in my digital photo in other people's clothes.

You see, nearly everything I wear is lovingly broken in by someone before I buy it. So my favorite photo is me walking a mile on the celebrated French street of stylish dreams in someone else's shoes. Literally. Thrift store or East side NY designer consignment, I've tried them all. But there is more to parler-vous. I

score big in Paris. And I don't even go into the Louis store. My favorite photo chronicles me at an important moment. I am on the verge of the biggest fashion score of my consignment career. Unknowingly, I'm ready to hit the mother load. And those who are spending their euros in the Palace of Vuton have a lesson to learn that I will soon teach on the streets of Paris: cheap can be so chic.

Killer style in Paris is not housed on runways or within the grand walls of the fashion giants, but shelved in small consignment stores in the side streets of the City of Lights. And it is style that takes you to scale new fashion heights...or in this case widths.

What I bought in Paris is a hat the size of Texas, Black. Le Chapeau Noir of any woman's dreams, the hat that rivals Audrey Hepburn's Ascot straw, designed by Edith Head for My Fair Lady. One of a kind, and one hell of a price. Now, think back to Louis Vuton where my "sistahs" are laying down thousands of dollars to carry a genuine French Louis purse. Me, I am opening my own Vuton knock off bag, a clutch Louis -- direct from Canal Street NYC--spending 30 euros. And it buys someone else's black shiny straw hat. Okay it's bigger than a pizza. But Kate Winslet regally wore a similar the chapeau in the opening scene from Titanic. Why not me?

And did I need a hat that dramatic? Absolument!. I was going to a wedding on the Siene the next day and I would meet the challenge of style suited to a Parisienne yacht wedding at dusk. And I would do it without forking over the equivalent of a mortgage payment. That alone created high drama.

As I carried my purchase to the taxi for the ride to the hotel, I had a feeling that the hat had changed everything for me on that trip.

My first clue that things were going to be different was simply getting in a taxi.

I love to walk in Paris, but my fabulous hat was presenting problems as I carried it along the Rue St. Honore. It was drawing sidelong looks from passersby and getting in the way of pedestrians as I navigated the twisting street, so for time and convenience sake, we took a cab. The hat rode in the front of the taxi while my husband and I shared the back seat. Little did we know that the hat was now in the driver seat for the rest of our stay.

Another indicator that the hat was exceeding its purchase value came later that evening. Upon returning to the room from dinner, I scolded my husband for moving the hat to the hotel's window ledge risking the chance that it might fall to the courtyard below. He emphatically denied touching the bargain, thus giving way to

the obvious: either the turn down maid had found the hat irresistible as moi and had tried on the chapeau, or the hat had taken it upon itself to travel.

The allure of the 30 Euro French chapeau continued. It inspired me.

The next evening, I wore the hat with a consigned, strapless cocktail dress, making me feel like some cross between Andy Mc Dowell in Four Weddings and a Funeral and Natasha in Rocky and Bullwinkle. I bought black lace stockings and had the overwhelming urge to don a pair of sleek black sunglasses to top off the effect.

So strong was my impression of a Parisian somebody as I stood across from the Louve, that the doorman of the Hotel pleaded with me to return to the lobby. He was trying to hail a cab to take us to the River Siene. The hat was stopping traffic. Horns blared and French curses filled the air. Even the most jaded Parisian seemed taken with the sight. A tour bus group of Japanese visitors nearby me, could not resist pointing their cameras," Le Chapeau Noir" became the final stop on the tour. I found myself instinctively taking on the pose in the Louis photo, look bored. Look stylish.

The hat had was now in charge.

The rest of the evening was memorable for the Chapeau Noir. It was the hit of the yacht wedding, challenging the bride's own tasteful beige tulle hat, and mocking it with its striking presence. And did women love it. The hat was passed around from guest to guest, photographed to the point of distraction. Women who did not smoke cigarettes lit up when wearing the hat. I suspected that my theory about the chambermaid was true. The hat was irresistible. It had to be experienced. It danced the night away on the heads of young and old and finished the evening at the Bastille where it was worn briefly by a charming French waiter who served up the last bottle of champagne at five in the morning in an all night café.

It was the last time I saw my treasure.

As much as I loved my chapeau noir, I felt it belonged to the world. And I also knew that I was boarding a flight back to the US in a few hours and barely able to get myself on the plane after an all nighter in Paris, I entrusted my hat to a friend who lived in NY City. She promised to bring the hat home at any cost. Yet, my other theory would hold true. The hat, set free from the consignment store, had its own plan...it wanted to travel.

Since then, the Chapeau noir has journeyed through Switzerland, Italy, Britain

and France. It graces the heads of lovely women, friends and friends of friends who are taken by its chic, cheap charm. It has smoked endless cigarettes, drunk countless glasses of wine and has, I suspect, even witnessed trysts.

It is lent, borrowed and returned, over and over. And its power to make drama wherever it goes makes it killer style. It is the subject of emails that have flown back and forth from the USA to the UK to Paris.

And like a child that has a special place in your heart, that you've set free, it is missed. You want it to come home.

In short, fini. I want my chapeau back.

So sometime soon I will board a plane to Paris and bring my summer treasure home. Adding it to my collection of clothes that other people wear, I will use free air miles and stay with friends when I collect it, keeping the cost of owning the cheap 30 Euro hat from breaking me as I claim it for myself again. And this time, I plan to return to the Louis Vutton store on the Champs Elysee and take a new travel photo. Moi, in my beloved chapeau noir, not outside the temple of style, but inside the extravagant interior. I will pose for this photo beside the Louis Vutton bags wearing a million dollar smile and a 30 Euro hat, that, if it could talk, would render it priceless.

Quelle photo...An American in Paris, not looking bored, but looking tres stylish in a chapeau noir that travels, taking all who wear it to fabulous heights of glamour.