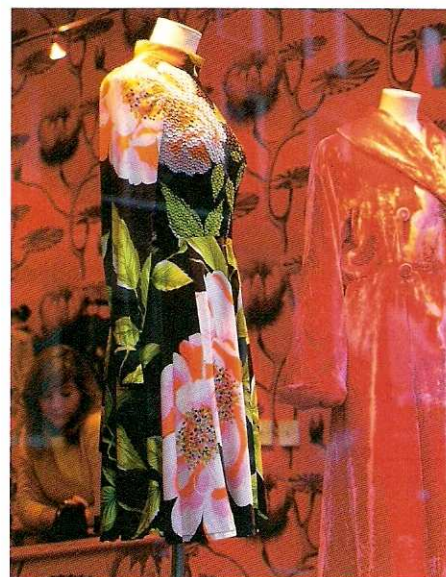


Moore style

Pendle Harte talks frocks and fashion with **Mary Moore** in Clarendon Cross

Mary Moore's Clarendon Cross shop is more of a gallery than a regular retail outlet. Sure, you can buy things, but that's almost a sideline. Just a small and select part of her vast collection is on display at any one time and when we meet she is putting the finishing touches to a "rehang". The stylish shop showcases Mary's collection of clothes, amassed over the past 40 years as a personal obsession, never really intended to be sold – but when the hoard outgrew her own wardrobe, a shop seemed the only thing to do with it all.

Mary is the only daughter of sculptor Henry Moore and she grew up surrounded by his work; inspired by his textile designs and by her mother's innate sense of style, especially her taste in dresses. "I always



remember her in dresses," says Mary. An enthusiasm for fashion led to a love of old clothes and in 1960, as a teenager, Mary began seeking out second hand frocks. "This was before 'vintage' – it was just called 'second hand' then," she says. "I used to go to a lot of parties and was too mean to spend a lot of money on new clothes when you ran the risk of someone else turning up in the same dress." So she'd head for the second hand shops of Camden Town and King's Road and rifle through until she found the perfect items. "What we did in the 1960s was wear old 1940s dresses and adapt them by adding a belt or a leather jacket. I started buying things from the 1920s to the 1950s – though I was also wearing Mary Quant and Ossie Clarke at the time, but I didn't keep those things. I don't sell labels now, except for Pucci." Generally she's more interested in what she calls "school of" items – school of Ossie Clarke, say, but Pucci is irreplaceable, she says.

Mary estimates that she has about 1000 pieces, half of which she's never worn, with more coming in than going out. She's always shopping, mostly in the US, for herself as well as the shop, though she'll be persuaded to sell from her own wardrobe "if someone looks more fabulous than me in something. I do want them to be worn". What Mary is really selling, however, is her eye, because mostly people have no idea what they want when they come through her door. Often she'll work by a process of elimination, establishing what someone wants by finding out the occasion, their preferred dress length,

sleeve length, colour, neckline and so on. "What's on the rails is such a small fraction of what I've got that I treat it as a collection of samples, and when I get an idea of what someone wants, I'll go and search for it in the basement." Mary gestures to a staircase, which leads to the mysterious basement, where nobody except she is allowed to go. "Really, it's just chaos," she says, though I do wish she'd let me have a peek. A thousand dresses, all categorised in a way that allows her to pull out just the thing when someone comes in and requests, say, something green, knee-length and chiffon. "It's only recently that women have

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started wearing jeans all the time and it's left them with no idea of what suits them," says Mary. But she has a very good idea: essentially she's playing a full-time, grown-up dressing up game, happily pinning hems and debating how to adjust darts to improve a fit. "Sometimes just a couple of millimetres will make all the difference," she enthuses.

In the shop, after the rehang, cocktail dresses are at the fore, and they are creatively arranged according to colour and theme, not by item or period. "I'm not great on daywear," says Mary. "Anyway, modern daywear is fine, especially separates. I wouldn't sell old jeans because new ones are just so much better." Mostly there are dresses, coats and jackets and they range from flowing pieces of ethnic



psychedelia to sharp, shaped dresses in 1950s cuts, darty box jackets and 1940s print tea frocks.

In addition to her vintage collection, Mary is planning a sideline in new dresses cut to a 1940s pattern in vintage textiles and modern silks, which may appear this year. Also she has launching a textile prize for

students at Chelsea College of Art, where participants are asked to design a textile based on either a 1940s dress or a 1960s coat as a modern take on vintage clothing, with the winning textile set to be put into production. Mary will be one of four judges and the others – as yet unconfirmed – will be someone from the world of pop

music, a big name fashion designer and someone from the college. It's a new prize and Mary's enthusiasm for it is infectious. There's something very child-like about Mary and she's extremely youthful, agile and twinkly for someone of around retirement age. All those dresses must be keeping her young. ■