SHE'S A DEDICATED FOLLOWER OF FASHION

Mel O'Brien juggles her online vintage fashion business Librarian Chic with teaching history at high school. But her inner librarian still thrives and she's been known to classify her vintage archive according to Dewey. For Mel, every garment has a story to tell, just like a good book.

When I am not busy classifying my vintage archive (and I admit, at times I get carried away and apply categories according to the Dewey Decimal Classification) I am styling fashion shoots, writing a novel and hunting down vintage clothes that fit within the ideal of my online shop, Librarian Chic.

I also have a busy schedule with my family which includes a husband, cat, dog and 11 year old twins. I balance life between the ideals and expectations that sometimes come from the 1950s ideal housewife and mother and sometimes from being a modern day entrepreneur in an ever-increasing revolution against 'fast fashion'.

Even though I now juggle my business with teaching high school history, I am still a librarian at heart. I have a deep desire to put things in order and this is the concept behind Librarian Chic. I also feel that collecting these clothes to pass on to women who will love and cherish them ties all the pieces of the puzzle together for me: history, fashion and cataloguing.

Pearls and glasses are a staple, of course, but it's more about taking classic looks and wearing them in a contemporary way. Like red lipstick by day or a mix of tweed and satin—practicality blended with imagination. I have great love for clothes that wear well, with a story woven into each item. My 'circulation desk' is the face of the business and, at times, the clothing does indeed circulate back and forth.

If your focus is on items that you love, and that fit in with your lifestyle and character, then they'll never go out of style. I like to think of it as styling for savvy

women; it's not frivolous but it's fun and sustainable. One can never be overdressed or overeducated.

When I worked in the reading room at the National Library I'd see the most fashionable women in beautifully tailored suits—outfits put together with great attention to detail. It was as though they were dressing up for those beautiful books, and I loved that.

Part of what I love about vintage, even though I prefer to call the collection of clothes "timeless", is that it's a backlash against fast fashion. Shopping should be about curating a collection, building a wardrobe you love and will adore forever; if you don't, then pass the garment on for someone else. Millions of items of clothing end up in landfill each year and it's a growing concern.

Many of the items in the collection for the online store are hand-picked, mostly from my travels to Sydney and Melbourne. I've had diplomats' wives get in touch with me, saying they have items I may be interested in. That's when I find the most amazing clothes, in beautiful condition, that they just don't have a use for anymore.

In most cases, they're still sentimental about the clothes and they want them to go to the right place.

It's satisfying to make connections with people, and to help facilitate Cinderella moments when they find an item that's perfect for them. Clothing, like literature, communicates in a most delicious way. I love the interaction between women and clothing, and what feels right. There's nothing better than seeing someone fall in love with an item they'll cherish. I see them coming out of the change room cuddling the clothes! And that's what it's about.

MEL O'BRIEN
info@librarianchic.com.au

Left: c.1950s Latte knit twin set perfectly accessorised. A Librarian Chic woman is almost always spotted with a book in her hands. Twin sets are famously worn by librarians and never out of style in our books.

Below: c.1980s Wash n wear frock. The Librarian Chic style is very true to its brand—it "resonates with women who are into history and literature, or who just want a look that embodies femininity and elegance".

Images courtesy of Raymond Mac Neill Photography.