



The independents

They face an uphill battle with rents (some rising as much as 400 per cent over the last decade), struggle to find spots that get some passing trade, have to compete with giant brand names with giant shops and giant marketing budgets, but in my opinion the best shopping is always to be found at an independent – and it's really to the independents up and down the UK that this book, and the accompanying television series, is dedicated.

It's true that their less-than-central location may mean you have to go out of your way to visit them, and that the selection of clothing at an independent store may not be the greatest. But the fact is that their selection has been carefully chosen for a particular type of shopper – you. It's a selection often sourced from the kind of unexpected, little-known manufacturers – the independents of clothing design, if you like – that you simply won't find anywhere else. If you want to dress like the masses who shop with the high street names, that's where you should shop. If you want to dress like you, explore a little.

Finding the treasures independents offer up is what makes shopping with them much more exciting than going to a high street store – somehow with those you always have a pretty accurate idea of what you'll find inside before you've even stepped over the threshold. Find the right independents for you and you'll also find your loyalty to them growing because they will save you so much time. Suddenly there's no need to go trailing around shop after shop: just a few have your taste nailed and all your needs catered to. They also tend to have a small, well-trained staff who know their onions and are keen to have your best interests catered to. Unsurprisingly, you can't say that about the Saturday boys and girls who tidy the rails of most high street stores.

I'm not above begging, but consider this a personal plea to support the independent shops in your area, and those you find on your travels. It's these shops that give the flavour to our streets and, I feel, do the most to make shopping for fashion what it should be: fun.