

Brent  
POPE

# Shopping dropout

## Mall theory: Right size, right style, right on!

FLASHBACK: I was 12 years old. My mother was taking me shopping for clothes. I tried on some jeans in the dressing room. My mom said, "Come out here so I can see if the pants fit!" So

I went out, and she loudly asked me questions like: "Do they feel tight in the butt?" "Are the pant legs short enough?" and "They don't pinch your little

peter, do they?" Since then, shopping has ranked very low on my list of "necessities of life," right below diarrhea.

Don't get me wrong, I enjoy shopping as much as the next Ewok from the forest moon of Endor (I have no idea what that means), but I like to do it my way.

I staunchly believe that this activity must be done only under the strictest of guidelines. Here they are:

1. Know what items you want to buy before you go.
2. Know where you want to buy these items.
3. Know how long you want to spend browsing. (Maximum time limit: 15 minutes.)
4. No questions about my "peter."

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And it's not like I haven't tried. My fiancée occasionally gets me to go to the mall with her, but when I attempt to use my guidelines, I find that they are useless against her Imelda Marcos-like shopping prowess. Here's what usually happens:

First, we go to a clothing store. Oh look, a rack of shirts that are ON SALE. If I look at a rack of shirts and I don't see one I like in the first three shirts, I'm outta there! Rachel, on the other hand, is much more thorough. She looks at every single shirt, feels it, holds it up to the

light, looks for holes or missing buttons, checks the washing instructions label, and also looks at every duplicate shirt, just in case one happens to look just a little bit better than the rest of the EXACT SAME SHIRTS! And that's just to decide if she wants to try it on.

I never try on clothes anymore. All I need is something my size that I like; that's it.

Of course, the most useless part of our shopping expeditions is when she asks "Does this (insert article of clothing) look good?" I call this part useless because my answer to this question will have absolutely no impact on whether or not she buys the article of clothing in question.

If I say, "Yes, it looks just dandy," then she says, "It's ugly. I can't believe you like it."

If I say, "No, it's appalling," then she says "Oh, it's so cute. I can't believe you don't like it." It's like trying to catch a fly ball near the right field fence at Yankee Stadium: You can't win. (By the way, I believe that little boy should have been caned Singapore-style.)

Anyhow, after a few hours of excruciating shopping, I'm basically in a coma. By this time, the most important thing for a store to have is a chair. If it doesn't have one, I don't go in. I can't, because they won't let me sit on the floor.

It always ends the same way. Our last stop is the shoe store, where I collapse into a chair and converse with someone with a name like Elmer or Ole Smitty. We talk about World War II, the Dust Bowl, and free BINGO at McDonald's.

Eventually Rachel takes pity on me and we go home.

But I don't really feel sorry for myself, I feel sorry for Elmer and Ole Smitty. They've been diving into store chairs for decades. I've only just begun.

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Heather  
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# A homey addiction

## Cable's domestic deities captivate my hearth

My textbooks haven't seen the light of day in weeks. My dirty laundry has taken on a life and a peculiar fragrance of its own. If I don't get this monkey off my back

soon, I may have to seek help in a 12-step program.

It isn't alcohol. It isn't drugs. It's my addiction to the Home and Garden channel and the Food Network on cable. I've

become a home-decorating and recipe junkie.

I couldn't be the average college couch potato who spends hours watching MTV. I have to embarrass my friends and family with my dreams of becoming a domestic goddess, the next Martha Stewart.

Martha Stewart is my idol. If you don't know who Martha Stewart is or watch her show, you're missing out on hours of humiliating yourself. Martha is the guru of the perfect home.

I was once in love with Julia Childs, but her French accent and high-pitched, shrill voice reminded me too much of Painter Smurf (1980s cartoon flashback). Besides, Julia only cooked. Martha can do anything.

Martha can take a pile of steamy garbage and make it into a lamp. She can take used Kleenex and tinfoil and make elegant holiday ornaments. She can whip up a dinner party for 20 in a half-hour, without having to include hot dogs in her menu. And her

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definition of the perfect pastry doesn't include Pop-tarts.

My advice is to watch her handiwork, but don't try it at home. This is where the humiliation comes in. Anything you try will never turn out as beautifully as Martha's.

During one show Martha made this magnificent chocolate cake decorated with chocolate leaves. I managed to make the cake, it was the chocolate leaves that tripped me up. Martha used real tree leaves and poured melted semi-sweet chocolate on the waxy sides. She then cooled them and peeled off the chocolate imprint of the leaf.

Though it sounds rather easy, it seems to be a talent that God gave only to Martha. When I went to peel off the chocolate, chunks of oak leaf stuck to the confection. I tried to get them all off, but I seemed to have failed at that too. When I turned to one of my dinner guests at dessert, I noticed a piece of green stem stuck to her lip.

I tried to explain to her that roughage was a necessary part of

every diet, but she wasn't amused.

I also want to mention right now that one should not use leaves from the poison ivy and marijuana families. They do not go over well either.

Martha isn't my only cable friend though. I also like to watch Molto Mario. He's this Italian cook who looks like a cross between a leprechaun and Gregg Allman, Cher's ex-husband and the leader of The Allman Brothers Band.

Molto Mario has yet to break out in song, but last night he made a lovely grilled swordfish with a side of vegetables, topped with a fabulous balsamic vinegar dressing. OK, it looked like nothing I would ever eat, but the way he julienned those vegetables made me hot.

Following Mario's show, there is a cooking game show that puts Bob Barker's Plinko exploits to shame. It's called Ready, Set, Cook. The show brings in two famous chefs from upscale East Coast restaurants (no Weenie Hut chefs are invited) and pairs them with two audience members.

The two audience member contestants go to the grocery store and pick out five or six items for the chef to make into a culinary masterpiece. Both chefs are given a pantry of staples like spices, flour and milk. The chefs are given 20 minutes to cook, and then they are judged.

My goal is to be a contestant on this show. Most contestants bring their chefs basic items: tomatoes, chicken, shrimp, rice. I would want to challenge my chef.

"OK, audience, let's see what Heather has brought for her chef!!" (Applause.)

"Well, today I brought Pierre a box of Fruit Loops, a stalk of celery, chili sauce, a can of Spam, and a package of unsweetened Kool-Aid."

(Applause. French cuss words. More applause.)

Sometimes Martha and the other chefs on these shows tend to go too fast for the average viewer at home. Because the shows are short, they have to make the meals in elapsed time. By the time you saute your beef, they're digesting the meal.

"Dammit, Molto Mario, SLOW DOWN!!" I scream, pelting the TV with onion. "Did you say one teaspoon of curry or a cup?"

Most shows offer viewers copies of recipes. I say forget the recipes. Prepare a bowl of macaroni and cheese, garnish it julienned hot dogs and serve with a lovely white milk. Perfection!

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