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Fashionability is free at a 'naked lady' swap shop

One woman's sartorial slip-up is another's fabulous new treasure, writes **Anna Burnside**

Fast fashion is wasteful. One million tonnes of textiles go to landfill every year, and that is just the stuff we throw out. Add the pieces we take to charity shops, pass on to friends or just leave hanging, unworn and resentful on the rail, and there is much scope for swapping.

Catherine Sinclair and Karen Finlayson, who run the style consultancy Renideo in Edinburgh, are all too familiar with the lonely jackets and unloved dresses that lurk in Scotland's spare rooms. They have seen the 10 pairs of identical black trousers, the dowdy skirt that was a gift from a sister, the coat bought when Blair still had brown hair. So when the pair encountered the New York trend for clothes exchanging, it made perfect sense to roganise one here.

In America they call them naked lady parties because everyone whips down to their pants to try things on.

The ladies even brought a couple of sartorial slip-ups to get the ball rolling. "This is a Stella McCartney belt I bought at H&M," says Sinclair, holding up a highly desirable strip of slinky, silvery honeycomb. "I queued up for it and elbowed everyone out of the way, but that was before I discovered I needed to wear yellow metals." Her face shows how reluctantly she has come to this decision. She has also brought an Orla Kiely skirt, bought on eBay for £50. "It is completely different to the picture. And it is too big."

Finlayson waves a short, fitted jacket from All Saints: "I loved the grey colour, but it's just wrong for my shape," she says sadly. "It stops right at my tummy."

My fellow swappers, mostly in their late thirties and forties, sigh in sympathy. "I tried to make it work for me, but I couldn't."

We all make mistakes. The good thing about a ditch'n'switch party – Sinclair and Finlayson thought a less alarming name might work better in the capital – is that other people get a chance to get their paws on them. I arrive with a pencil skirt I can't walk in, a chiffon top that refuse tosit properly across the bust and a silk one that is two inches too short. Several hours, a glass of champagne and quite a few mini fish cakes later, I leave with a pillar-box red dress and Sinclair's rejected skirt.

Most swappers seem delighted with their booty. Dorothy Halliday brought a pair of black patent zippered ankle boots that would make a Nuts reader blush. She bought them on a

shopping trip with her friend Judy MacFarlane, who is here with her this evening. “We egged each other on,” they admit.

“They were far too big. But they were also £24 in the sale. How could you not?” says Halliday.

The boots attract a good deal of interest and ribald comment. Halliday, however, has never actually worn them out and is enchanted with her new brown crochet shrug.

“So useful,” she gloats. “Why would anyone give that away?” Her friend Sue Lawson leaves with an evening dress for an up-coming black tie do. Lynn Ritchie has a new skirt for work. It is DKNY.

“All the things I brought were guilty secrets, unworn, with the tags still on. One was even in the charity shop bag,” says Ritchie. “The others were in the wardrobe, but you know, after a while, when it’s not going to happen.”

“It takes a bit of courage to come here and put your fashion disasters up on a rail for everyone to see,” says Sinclair. “I’m delighted so many people have been brave enough to come.”

A special commendation for courage must go to her mother-in-law, Fiona Sinclair, who took the kinky boots. “I had to have them,” she says with a wicked grin. “They were too stylish to leave.”