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Uncommon Sense

9 ways to look rich but live cheap

Rise above your measly income and worn-out shoes. You can live the Simply Fabulous lifestyle and enjoy cushy perks even without being adopted by the Rockefellers.

By MP Dunleavy

Want to look as if you're living a wealthier lifestyle than you actually are? Me too! In fact, I come

from a long line of frugal women who obeyed the motto: "Live well, look rich and never let the world know how little you're really paid." An excellent philosophy, which can be summed up as "Live cheap, look rich."

Sure, I daydream about having millions to throw around -- and so do you. (Americans spend about \$25 billion each year on lottery tickets in fruitless pursuit of this dream.) But people who have mastered the Live Cheap, Look Rich way of life know that it's not about having more money, it's about getting more out of life for the money you have.

And looking (and feeling) well-heeled while you do it. "Just because you don't have a fat wallet doesn't mean you have to go without life's pleasures," says Shel Horowitz, author of "The Penny-Pinching Hedonist" and founder of the [FrugalFun.com](#) Web site. Here is a quick boot camp on how to cultivate a more affluent way of life without actually spending a lot of money on it.

The art of affluence

One thing masters of the Live Cheap, Look Rich lifestyle will tell you is that wealth is just as much about your mindset as it is about your bank account. So learning to live a richer life may require you to start by thinking differently.

Buy classics. At first this sounds like an expensive move; classics always cost more. But

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for certain purchases, spending more may be a better investment in the long run. Take cashmere. It's ridiculously expensive. And yet I rely on my small hoard of cashmere sweaters because they not only look smashing, but they will last long after that GAP wool-blend sweater falls apart. Same with cars. "I decided to buy a five-year-old BMW this year," says Sandy deNicolais, former fashion and beauty editor of *Women's Day*. "The payments for a brand-new Honda were the same. But in five years, that Honda won't be worth as much as my BMW. The BMW will last longer, it's higher quality, it's got more style."

Travel creatively. As I learned at my upscale women's liberal arts college, wealthy people are always just coming back from somewhere fabulous and far away. And you can too, with a little ingenuity. By logging onto [Luxury Link](#), a luxury travel auction site, one friend of mine bought a five-night stay at swanky Little Dix Bay in the British Virgin Islands for about \$900. No, that didn't include airfare, but she and her partner didn't spend any more than they would have on a dull stateside getaway. If you can travel at the last-minute, remaindered airline seats are sold for cheap on the [Smarter Living](#) Web site. Or you can consider the many options that let you stay somewhere princely for nothing -- international hosting or home-swapping services. Some of these networks charge a fee to join, but it's usually reasonable. Horowitz says that he and his wife and daughter stayed for 12 nights in Wales last year and paid a total of \$50 for lodging, thanks to the generosity of a SERVAS host.

Vicarious wealth by volunteering. Major charities always need volunteers, and they often hold a yearly bash where you can meet and mingle with the rich and famous. Or you can volunteer at a local theater or arts organization and gain access to pricey cultural events without paying a dime. Black-tie events are not only for those who can afford the \$500 door ticket. It's for those who hold the doors, too. Horowitz ushers at a local music venue, and in the last few years has attended concerts by Bob Dylan, Willie Nelson, Chuck Berry. "Those tickets would have cost me \$500 to \$600 out of pocket."

Giving the appearance of wealth. It's far easier to acquire the kind of manners and good breeding that come along with a wealthy upbringing than it is to go back and change the way you were raised. Some pointers from Jill Spiegel, author of "Flirting for Success: The Art of Building Rapport."

- Always be well-groomed. Pay attention to your hair, nails and shoes.
- Be gracious. To everyone. Speak calmly and kindly, says Spiegel, the great-great granddaughter of catalog merchant Joseph Spiegel. "Rich people are too well-bred to be rude."
- Don't discuss money. People with money don't need to mention

what things cost, nor do they appear to care.

Purge the poverty from your life. Hard-core Feng Shui believers will tell you that a plant in a certain place and a mirror in another will bring you lifelong prosperity. (I know because I have "The Feng Shui of Wealth" at home.) All I know is that cleaning out the clutter in your life, moving the furniture so that it feels more harmonious, not only feels good, it forces you to admit that the end table is broken and the lamp shade needs replacing and yes, it's time to buy a new refrigerator. In other words, pay attention to all the ways that poverty has crept into your home -- and make a point of fixing or upgrading each one. Living a life of affluence doesn't mean buying hand-burnished leather couches from Uzbekistan. It means taking the stains out of your carpet, oiling the squeaky door. Living in comfort, ease and beauty. That may not cost much more than elbow grease.

Never pay retail. Given how many discount stores and Web sites there are, it's ridiculous to pay full price for anything. You can dress like Vogue editor Anna Wintour for a fraction of what she pays, just by shopping at Target, which features super-cheap but trendy duds by high fashion designer Isaac Mizrahi.

Other ways to enrich your wardrobe: shop at consignment (aka "secondhand") stores, but only in tony areas. Christine Sparta, a freelance writer in New Jersey, bought a Christian Dior suit at just such a place for \$58. No, I didn't forget a zero.

Learn to work the Web. "If I see a pair of designer shoes at Bloomingdales," says deNicolais, "I know I can find the same exact pair for \$50 or \$60 less at SHOEBUY.COM." I like to go straight to the "clearance" section of my favorite retailers online -- from L.L. Bean to Victoria's Secret to Crate & Barrel. I've gotten amazing deals.

And learn to time your purchases. National retail chains like Banana Republic, Ann Taylor and others have a merchandise cycle of about 6 to 8 weeks. After about four weeks of being out on the floor, the chain then rotates full-price items to discounted tables. Keep your eye on the cycle at your favorite stores so that you're always buying at a discount.

Learn to hobnob. Be part of the society set without a trust fund. Look up charitable events in your area. (Usually they're listed in the local paper, and charities often post their calendars online.) And go schmooze - - I mean, hobnob. Want to attend a benefit for the Lauri Strauss Leukemia Foundation, featuring performances by Liza Minelli and the New York Pops at schmancy Carnegie Hall? Tickets start at \$15.

Make a bid for luxury items. Even upscale auction houses like Christie's

or Sotheby's may offer good deals on unique items for your home, and most are free and open to the public for previewing merchandise. You'll want to skip the Italian Renaissance footstools. But sometimes a group of worthwhile items from an estate sale will be sold as a lot, with bids starting as low as \$700, says Michel Witmer, an art historian and lecturer in New York. "Auction houses are a treasure trove." Of course, most treasure requires some digging, and arcade sales -- lower-priced auctions at big houses -- are a great place to start if you want furnishings with the air of old money.

Get married, but don't have kids. According to Andrew Oswald, an economist at the University of Warwick in England and something of an expert on the intersection of money and happiness, getting married adds a happiness factor that's equivalent to having \$100,000 added to your household income. This is not true of having children, Oswald says. His surveys have found that adding kids to your life (or not having them at all) didn't seem to change people's happiness one way or the other. Which is good. Kids are expensive, and since most rich people just send theirs away to boarding school anyway, you could argue that the best thing for your Live Cheap, Look Rich lifestyle is not to have the little darlings in the first place.

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