

SHE'S
GOT THE
LOOK

"Once I was in a taxi hurrying down Madison Avenue, and my husband was driving a little ways behind me, in less of a rush. I glanced at a shop window and saw this gold, capelike jacket and nearly gasped. I called my husband and said, 'Can you please pull over and buy that for me? I don't know what it is, but I need it.' He did. And I still wear it constantly. If something inspires a level of desire that insane, it's a good sign that it's really and truly you."

—KATE VALENTINE
SPADE, DESIGNER



Lady in Red

After a communist childhood, Margarita Gokun Silver finds liberty in the juniors' department.

I'M A FAN OF cropped sweaters, low-rise pants, and ripped jeans, especially boyfriend cut. When I shop at Zara, I head straight for the TRF section, which is geared toward women under 25—even though I'm in my late 40s. My daughter frequently tells me I dress as if I were her age. "Very trendy, Mom," she says, with a nod of approval.

I owe my personal style to the draconian restrictions of a nation that no longer exists. Born and raised in Moscow, I spent my teens lusting after fashions from beyond the Iron Curtain and hating the shapeless gray garments favored by the Communist Party. Clothes sold in Soviet stores reminded me of the babushkas perched in front of apartment buildings, scolding my generation with their suspicion and gossip.

Unlike most of my friends, who could access foreign-made apparel only through the black market, I had a father whose work regularly took him to Eastern Bloc countries, and I lived for

when he'd come home, carrying suitcases laden with imitations of mid-1980s acid-washed Levi's. Then his job changed, and he stopped traveling; I had to settle for sewing.

My mother and I spent hours duplicating patterns—voluminous plaid skirts and shoulder-padded blouses—from a smuggled-in West German fashion magazine. That ended when we emigrated to the U.S. in 1990: The smorgasbord of clothing dazed me. I'd thumb through the racks in Marshalls, assembling outfits I'd seen on *Style with Elsa Klensch* and marveling at designer denim.

Thirty-plus years after my first illicit pair of jeans, my fashion sense may still be in a state of delayed adolescence, but dressing young satisfies my need to stand apart. Though I'll soon approach the age of the babushkas of my youth, I'll never be them, in spirit or in dress. With all my former constraints lifted, I cherish the option to choose—especially if the choice is frayed denim culottes.