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Timeless: Pearl-trimmed maxi dress, £39.50

cropped jacket at £25 screams 'Kill me now!', but a cream pleated dress, for £39.50, is OK, as is a print maxi dress, £39.50, with its high waist.

The Emanuel collection all feels quite fashiony, too: use of mesh, floral, and fluoro colours...

I speak to half-a-dozen customers outside my local branch on Tuesday afternoon, and all the women are enthusiastic.

When I ask Jean, who is 74, why she doesn't go to Primark instead (the sweaters there are better quality, for example), she says she finds it too big, too intimidating.

And when I ask Mary, who is in her 70s, whether she wouldn't rather buy a top that is better quality and that will last, she replies: "There's no point. I won't be around much longer!"

Which pretty much sums up Bonmarché. It doesn't care too much about fashion. It knows its customers want garments that are easy to get on and off, without too many fiddly fastenings, and at prices they can afford.

But I'd advise the new owners to forget the sweat-shirts and the vests. Why not aim wholeheartedly at women of retirement age?

You know, the ones referred to by Mary Portas as 'old biddies', who are neglected on the High Street, with only the M&S Classics range to fall back on. Improve the quality



THE RULE: PRETEND YOU'RE A GUEST IN THE SPARKLING MARRIED people can be assistants better than the partners. Couples get into a bit of fighting they can't seem to stop when they're alone together.

I'LL BID YOU...

PRETAPORTOBELLO, the online market site that picks the best buys from Portobello, Camden and Brick Lane markets to browse from the comfort of your home has introduced a haggling function. It allows users to bid on clothes. Start low and you could bag yourself quite a bargain.

■ pretaportobello.com

SPRING FRESH



GET RID of your house of eau de children with this spring-scented candle that contains tuberose, jasmine and vanilla. The wax is blended to ensure a lasting fragrance and, being a master florist, Timothy Dunn knows a thing or two about floral fragrances.

■ *Mille Fleur in Lotus Blossom & Tuberose, £42, timothydunnlondon.com*

UNIQUELY YOU

IF YOU walk into a friend's house only to discover you've both ordered the same living room from John Lewis or Ikea.

to see if I really could improve my marriage

THE RULE: PRETEND YOU'RE A GUEST IN THE SPARKLING MARRIED people can be assistants better than the partners. Couples get into a bit of fighting they can't seem to stop when they're alone together.

Dr Lerner tells of a husband and wife couple she counselled who were constantly at each other's throats. Nothing helped until a couple of years ago. An English professor, came to live with her for several months.

He stayed in the bedroom with his wife and theirs — and the couple were so courteous to one another that he knew they could be overheard. During his stay, they said that marriage was the best it had been.

Since then, Dr Lerner has seen many warring couples that they thought their respected guest is staying. This is most couples have never seen over themselves than they do. It only takes one person to keep the other in mind to change their relationship.

MY EXPERIENCE: For me, the easiest rule to put into action is to have a variety of characters in my mind.

My favourite was Hercule Poirot. Agatha Christie's prim Belgian detective — and I imagined he was sleeping in the room next to ours.

What would he think if he overheard me bickering about nonsense?

I was amazed to find I was looking at a little differently towards my husband if I imagined Poirot or other characters were around.

It baffled me — my husband was a person I love most in the world. It was mere acquaintances better than friends. This realisation spurred me to put much more effort into my marriage and to try implementing other rules.

THE RULE: JUST ONE CRITICISM PER DAY

IN THE courtship stage, you should automatically know how to make your partner feel good. But once you start to slip as more focus is placed on criticisms. Nobody can su-

Round green vase, £29.50, marksandspencer.com

