

# Livingabroad

FOR PEOPLE CHOOSING A NEW LIFE OVERSEAS

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# Paris, je t'aime...

By following her heart to Paris, Tara Munro was able to indulge her lifelong passion for vintage clothes

By **Nicki Grihault**

**T**HEY SAY THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE never runs smoothly, and this was certainly true for 32-year-old Tara Munro. After a long stint of dating cheese buyers, posh lawyers and kooky DJs, her heart was broken by a high-profile travel writer, who ditched her to search for gold on a cattle drive in Australia.

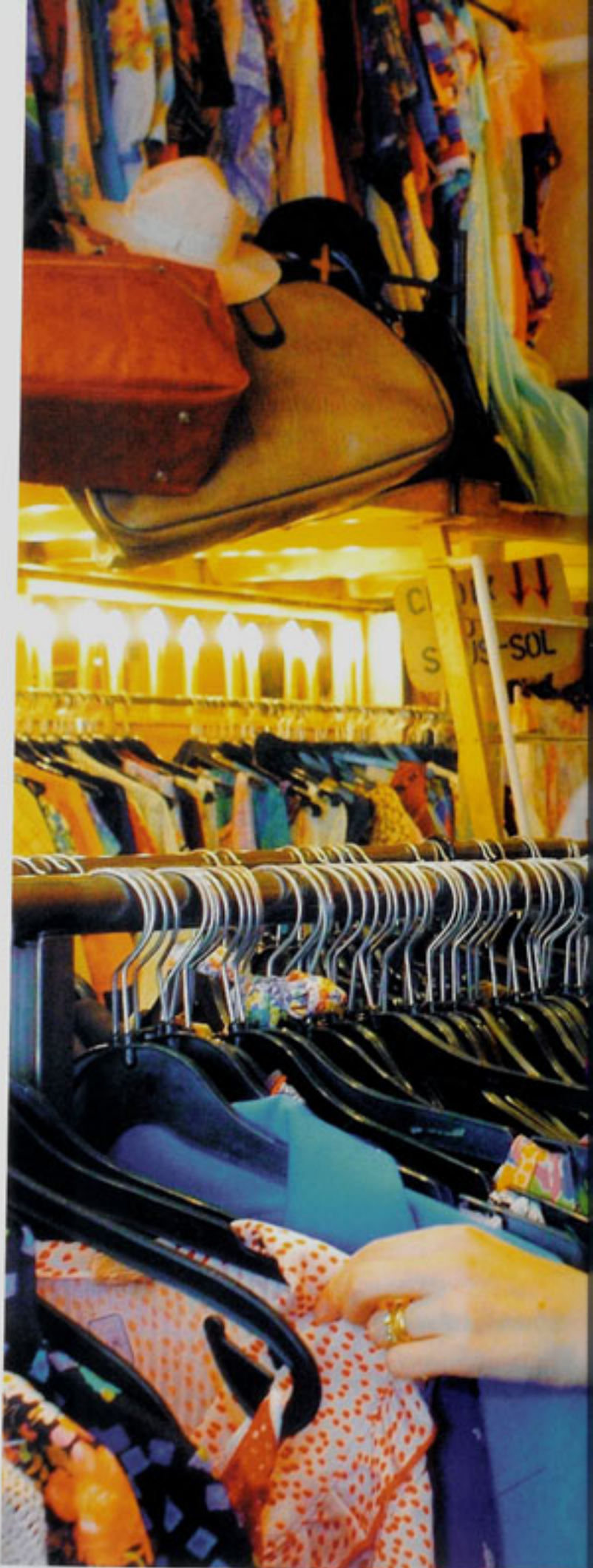
Trying to move on, she put on her lipstick and forced herself to go to a work function at London's Shoeless Joes.

"I noticed this smooth, dark and mysterious Frenchman across the room," she says. "Later, he was standing right next to me. After a brief conversation, he said, 'Do you want to come and visit me in Paris?' Two weeks later, I jumped on a plane."

Laurent put Tara up in a hotel suite with a view of the Eiffel Tower and one weekend led to another. They spent their time cruising the city of romance on his motorbike, stopping at his favourite Paris spots – old cafés and funky bars in La Marais and Ile St Louis – checking out the flea markets of Porte de Clignancourt and walking through leafy parks.

But, although she may have been seduced by Paris, Tara didn't want to leave London, where she had a successful career in travel PR.

And Laurent didn't want to leave Paris. >











Despite never wanting to leave London, Tara has managed to create a wonderful career around a fabulous lifestyle in the heart of the French capital



Having been sales director for Le Moulin Rouge, where he would take the Bluebell girls out to India, Las Vegas and the Grand Prix, he had moved into a successful career with brasserie chain Les Freres Blanc. It seemed a no-hope situation.

When Laurent next came to London, over a romantic evening of champagne and oysters at the Terence Conran restaurant Meza, the relationship continued. But there was still the country issue to resolve. Tara stalled, hoping he would give in.

But he didn't.

"I'd fought for 10 years to make London my home. I'd finally got there, and he turned up!" she says. "I really didn't want to move to France, but I realised that he was the man for me, so I'd have to make it work. And then I got pregnant."

Tara commuted until the eighth month, then moved to Paris and a modern apartment in a lovely area near Mount Parnas on the outskirts of the city.

"I transformed from panicky, stressed-out PR exec to chilled and serene mother-to-be in a jiffy," she laughs, "although my first month in Paris involved drinking gallons of Orangina and wandering to WH Smith to get my UK newspaper fix."

After the birth of her son, Calum, sanity came in the form of Message for Mothers, a support

*I really didn't want to move to France but I realised he was the man for me – and then I got pregnant!*

organisation for over 1,000 English-speaking women living in Paris. Members visit Janet's home for coffee on Friday, Pam's son's birthday party on Saturday and a picnic on Sunday and so on. Although Tara had been broody since she was 20, having Calum, who is now a toddler, took some getting used to.

"It's been hard," she says. "Although I had seven years of French under my belt, with a child you can't just go out to bars and make friends."

The move also changed Tara's career. She began mooching around Paris looking for vintage clothes. Finding them at extremely cheap prices, she sold her first suitcase-full through a retro furniture shop in Brixton.

Noticing that her stylish friends in the UK were going mad for the clothes she was wearing – 1950s dresses, old shoes, suitcases, silk scarves and fur coats – it dawned on her that her new passion for flea markets, brocantes and car boot sales could make money.

From boarding the Eurostar with a couple of suitcases to hold her first "Vintage Pippadee" for friends in Brixton and doing "Vintage Fridays" at magazine houses, Dove Vintage was born. She took a stand at the Battersea Vintage Fashion Fair last May and is now talking to operators >







*When I was 14, my pretty Auntie Mo ran off to Milan with a rich Italian stud and joined a big fashion house*

about setting up hen weekends with a vintage fashion theme.

Looking back, Tara realises it was a business waiting to happen. "When I was 14, my pretty Auntie Mo ran off to Milan with a rich Italian stud and joined a big fashion house, sending our family boxes full of top-notch 1980s gear," she reflects.

"I remember going to school in some of these get-ups – hundreds of pounds worth of designer clothes – a timely joy for a kid who'd suffered thick specs and a big brace."

Embarking on a career in PR, Tara found she was doing much the same thing.

"PR means appearance, standing out from the crowd, being a bit glam," she says. At 24, she joined Lynne Franks (now Life PR) agency which did fashion publicity. Moving to travel PR for six years, she became an account director.

"I'm on TV sweetie!" she jokes. "As travel expert in the current series of *BBC Holiday*."

Although she still handles PR projects, she now spends much of her time poking around Le Marais, looking for dresses which can go for £7 there but can be found selling in Top Shop's vintage section for £45.



Tara's friends love an afternoon spent trying on her vintage finds, picked up in the flea markets of Paris

"You have to look hard, of course, as a lot of people are doing it," says Tara. "But there are the obvious and then the secret addresses."

Her mother-in-law has been invaluable at showing her those, and Laurent took her to the Red Cross warehouse.

"I was loading stuff up on the pushchair," she laughs, "£150 worth of stuff, worth £2,000. In a matter of months, I've turned a hobby into a flexible and portable career."

For Tara, the business is as much about a quest for work-life balance as a passion for clothes.

"It's a way of exploring the aspects of Paris I love best: flea markets, culture, glamour and effortless chic, as well as giving me a monthly visit to friends back in London," she says. "I'll never get rich as it's a time-consuming business and the real vintage treasures are getting harder to find, but since much of it revolves around weekends, Calum can come too."

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