

New car, new TV, new dress. Read how these families are saying no to keeping

up with the Joneses – and living with less is making them happy

Buy, buy, buy:

Catherine Lambert

KEEPING up with the Joneses has been replaced by a new mark of social status.

The tradition of buying the latest appliance, gadget and fashions is being challenged by a new wave of consumers, known as the New Joneses.

They are less concerned with keeping up than they are with living up. The New Joneses are still middle class but instead of buying the latest kitchen appliance they spend their money on learning a new language, taking an exotic vacation or developing a new skill in craft.

They want fewer objects and more experiences.

Swinburne Institute research fellow Aneta Podkalicka said psychological research shows that owning more does not equate to more happiness.

"There is a new economy emerging that places more value on immaterial goods," Ms Podkalicka said. "Investing in new skills renders you more social kudos than investing in new goods."

RMIT vice chancellor's senior research fellow Dr Tania Lewis is leading a study into the history of consumption in Australia, prompted by claims of suburban alienation and consumerism.

But Dr Lewis believes that, on the contrary, people are enjoying more community involvement.

"In my research I've found so many examples of ad hoc groups getting together to help each other," she said.

"There is a strong environmental awareness in this too. In the past it was about being a hippy activist, but this is

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ANETA PODKALICKA

very different — they're ordinary people making changes to their everyday lives.

"The consumer movement is very much about choice and that's what these people have grown up with, so they have a strong sense of choice. They are choosing not to consume as much."

Dr Lewis said the shift was partly a reaction to super-busy lifestyles.

"Our lives are full in certain ways, but not in a way that necessarily makes people satisfied," she said.

"Australians are among the top nations in the world in terms of working hours, and people are wanting a meaning. There is a shift in values taking place, back to a more simple way of life."

The *Sunday Herald Sun* spoke to people who have changed their lifestyle, buying less but experiencing more.



DOUGLAS McMASTER
SERIAL COMPOSTER

IN his first three years of life Douglas McMaster learnt a way of life that he still practises.

"Mum and dad were not well-off and would buy secondhand or re-use anything they could," McMaster said.

"Some of my earliest memories are of mum giving me a clip if I didn't finish all the food on my plate."

"Even now, if I can't physically finish it I will keep it for later."

"I strive to make the best food in the world but I would still eat a bad plate of food just to finish it."

The chef at Silo by Joost still works by that frugal philosophy and organic waste is placed in a dehydration compost machine which turns it into compost.

In his private life he rarely shops at the supermarket or buys anything new.

When he does make a new purchase it is only after months of research.

If he really wants or needs something he will save to buy the best so it lasts and does not need replacing.

"If I buy clothes, they will be very well made, and I have the best bike because they are things that are important to me," he said.

"I like nice things but I buy things to last."

He prefers to spend money on experiences rather than furniture or clothes.

"I saved for 16 years to burn it all in two years experiencing the 15 best restaurants in the world, but I wouldn't be here now if not for those experiences and people I met," he said.

"You can't buy that."

JILL CHIVERS
REFORMED SHOPAHOLIC



AN animal-print trench coat woke Jill Chivers from her shopaholic stupor three years ago.

She was about to buy the beautiful coat in Berkeley, California, when she was hit by a bolt of realisation.

"Out of the blue, I realised I already had three animal print trenches and yet I was seriously considering a fourth," Chivers said.

"I had a flash of awareness and asked myself, for the first time, what I was doing. I suddenly had a strong feeling of embarrassment and that was my 'no going back' point."

When she returned from her US trip she decided to take a year off from clothes

shopping and, now, she rarely shops, has saved thousands of dollars and has an entirely new value system.

"I was seized with a feeling of fear for many months at first that I would be missing out on something but, really shopping stops you from experiencing the fullness of life and it keeps you away from people," she said.

"I would go out to lunch and I couldn't wait to finish so I could look at shops. Now I look at the newspaper, have another cup of tea or talk to my friends or husband. It's been life-changing in many respects."



CASTELLAS FAMILY
NO NEW PURCHASES

WHEN Erin and Peter Castellás suggested to their four children that they would not buy anything new for a year, they were met with a few questions.

"Can we still buy chips and chocolate? Are we still going to have fun? Can we still go to movies and have parties?"

Luckily, their parents had already agreed to exclude food and experiences from their plan, along with medicine, underwear, cleaning products or books for school that were not available second-hand.

But everything else had

to be either borrowed, inherited, bought second-hand or done without.

Three months into the arrangement, the entire family is coping happily.

"Our spending behaviour changed immediately in that we don't buy on impulse and we question how much we really need something," Mrs Castellás said.

Mrs Castellás said the decision was made after moving to Australia two years ago and having a new baby which meant the family lived on one income.

"We had to make some decisions and thought it

would be great to take on the challenge of not buying anything new for a year without feeling deprived and transform it into a more conscious way of spending money," she said.

Mr Castellás is a sustainability consultant who makes a very good wage and they live in affluent Hampton, so the decision was not a necessity, but a worthy experiment.

Now they shop more at the Salvation Army shop and farmers' markets instead of supermarkets.

KEEPING UP WITH THE NEW JONESES

- A MICROFIBRE cloth is a great investment as it eliminates the need for a lot of detergents.
- PLACE a cup of baking soda or vanilla essence in an open container at the back of the fridge for a fresh odour.
- POUR a kettle of boiling water down the sink once a week to clean your drain.
- USE a refillable water bottle, a reusable coffee cup and shopping bags.
- PACK your own lunch as often as possible.
- USE public transport, walk or ride to work or school.
- KEEP a handkerchief in your bag to save on tissues.
- DRY your clothes outside – sunshine kills bacteria, dust mites and fades stains.
- BUY cookware and appliances that are made to last, avoiding Teflon.
- BUY local when possible – the fewer miles from farm to table the better.

Source: Malcolm Rands, ecostore founder