

LIVING/FYI

Oh, You Animal Print, You

You can't paper a room or cover an entire floor with them. And if you wear them head to toe, small children will run from you.

We're talking animal prints. They inject a note of glamour and almost never go out of style, but they are best appreciated in small, toe-dipping dosage.

They are everywhere this fall in a wide range of scarves, handbags, belts, glass frames, sweaters and boots and even shoes. In handbags, the status label Coach has had high visibility with a leopard pattern. But you can also track the cats back to Target stores. With shoes on a fanciful trip, the prints are a popular feature.

The patterned wedges such as these by Donald Pliner are a good investment. You can be sure no one will miss your feet.

Answer Me

So you're relaxing with friendly talk at a dinner party or on a barstool when all of a sudden you hear something that you know is flat wrong.

Your conversation partner is way off on Mark McGwire's batting stats, the next city picked to host the Olympics or the actors in the film "My Fair Lady."

You know you are right. You make a bet and vow to check the facts.

Now technology will soon allow you to get the answer on the spot. *The Wall Street Journal* says the service "AskMeNow" will be available in full-scale operation next month.

How it works: You phone in a question on your cell phone or e-mail it from a smart phone. The answer is sent back to you in three minutes or less. It's all done in a roomful of workers in the Philippines searching the Internet as fast as they can.

Some questions are free on a form-entry called "auto-answers," *WSJ* says. Or you can call in questions for 49 cents each. To start the service, users go to www.askmenow.com and sign up with name, ZIP code, cell phone number and country. The fees are charged through your cell phone carrier.

The system is most compatible now with Blackberry systems, but it should be available to other phones and gadgets in November. You'll be able to check the weather in Albany, N.Y., before you board a plane. You can find a movie you want to see in Chicago or find out what causes global warming.

The downside is, as *WSJ* notes, it's embarrassing if you are wrong.

Sale-A-Thon

American consumers love, love, love a bargain. They are always looking for value, Hallmark trend expert Marita Wesely-Clough says.

But finding good fashion at a price is a challenge. It can mean driving an hour across town to an outlet mall or wading through bins of discarded clothing pieces at a vintage store.

So it's not surprising that a new Web site is playing into the let's-make-a-deal trend. The site, Shop It to Me (www.shopittome.com), will search out sales involving your favorite apparel and accessory lines on the Internet. They'll keep you posted via e-mail.

You simply register on the Web site and choose your favorite brands among a long list of manufacturers and designers. You have a craving for Armani? They'll eventually find you a sale.

They also have many other names, ranging from Prada and Kate Spade to Nike, Theory and the Gap. They send you a daily or weekly summary of what is marked down and where.

You just sit back, paint your toenails, eat bonbons and punch buttons.

An Imperfect Pink

You could open a sizable boutique with all the pink-ribbon products designated to raise money for breast cancer awareness this month. They range from cleaning sponges and tons of beauty products to Keds on www.lovemyshoes.com.

Henri Bendels, the trendy New York department store, is teaming with British designer Bracher Endem to offer fancy, one-of-a-kind handbags on eBay beginning Wednesday. All proceeds go to the cause.

And QVC holds its annual shoe sale and live broadcast starting at 6 p.m. Oct 26. It is selling hundreds of shoes donated by designers at discounted prices. Marcia Cross and Felicity Huffman are expected to make appearances.

Meanwhile beauty company Sephora is giving 100 percent of the proceeds from the sale of three \$25 beauty kits for skin, lips and fragrances. All proceeds go to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. Beauty is a favorite category for the pinkers. The *New York Times* says the whole beauty lineup includes 16 products from Estée Lauder, 12 from Avon and eight from Revlon.

And on another note, the Lee Co. just presented the Komen foundation with \$8 million from Lee's annual National Denim Day, in which employees donate \$5 to wear jeans to work on a Friday.

But a new voice comes from a California group called Breast Cancer Action. These people question the validity of the campaigns. Although many companies announce the percentage of proceeds or net profits that go to a breast cancer group, many do not, the group notes in its "Think Before You Pink" campaign.

The group encourages consumers to query companies by e-mail as to how much will be given to what cause. After all, as the *Times* notes, the companies benefit from the good will that the giving brings. The group asks if they are exploiting a serious cause to raise their own profile.

Green Is In

Textiles and clothing friendly to the environment are getting more attention. For evidence consider the first national contest, "People's Choice Awards for Green Business of the Year."

It's Only Natural, a Kansas City retail store that specializes in fair trade and environmentally friendly apparel, is one of 70 businesses nominated from the membership of Co-op America's Business Network. Products range from recycled paper to fair trade crafts and organic food and clothing. Vote on www.coopamerica.org/peopleschoice by Friday.