

## Britt Maren Houston, TX

**W**ith her signature shock of peroxide-blond hair, Britt Maren weaves through a sea of shoppers like a very chic bolt of lightning. A dizzying labyrinth of boutiques, eateries, and amusements, the Galleria in Houston is the fourth-largest mall in America and Maren's old stomping ground. Back then it was Abercrombie & Fitch for preppy basics and Forever 21 for party dresses, but "I'm a much smarter shopper now," explains Maren, darting into Barneys Co-op. "I know it makes more sense to splurge on one nice thing that will last." Recent investment? The classic black quilted Chanel handbag tucked under her arm.

Before hair wizard Guido Palau famously cropped her locks for Balenciaga's spring 2011 show, Maren's style skewed girly; she still has a soft spot for feminine pieces like a baby-pink mohair Marc by Marc Jacobs sweater hanging on a rack. The trick is to "punk it up with a leather jacket and boots," she says, pointing down to her Western-inspired Alexander Wang booties. The transformation started with a starring moment for Wang's spring show, and her new look straddles the line between Southern girl next door and street-smart style maven. Shopping in her hometown conveniently allows her to flirt with both those sides, and after scouring the mall for high-end glamour she's on the hunt for local treasure, namely a pair of lace-up Justin Roper boots. Her quest leads to Retropolis, a vintage emporium in

nearby Houston Heights brimming with cowboy boots and pearly-snap-button Wrangler shirts, pieces that would sell for triple the price in New York. Bypassing a rack of glitzy, Alexis Colby-worthy dresses, Maren heads upstairs to the shoe department. As predicted, there is a generous stash of well-worn Justin Ropers in several different shades. She pulls on a pair in dusky brown. "Too small!" she says



**ZEST FOR LIFE**  
WITH HER BOYFRIEND, CHEF DEREK ORRELL, WEARING A WILLOW VEST (\$595; WILLOWLTD.COM), HELMUT LANG TANK (\$150; HELMUT LANG, NYC), AND BALENCIAGA BY NICOLAS GHESQUIÈRE JEANS (\$345; BALENCIAGA, NYC).

with a sigh. "Never mind; I have the black version bookmarked on eBay!"

A denim shirt with silver beading and leather fringe catches her eye. Since moving East last year the 20-year-old has certainly mastered the art of New York cool, but something about the kitschy charm of classic Americana still appeals. The closet she shares with her boyfriend in her Chelsea apartment might be tiny by Texan standards (what isn't?), but she makes space for a few essentials that remind her of her roots. "It's pretty

**SOUTHERN BELLE**  
THE TEXAN MODEL WEARS A JASON WU TUNIC (\$1,995; JASONWU.STUDIO.COM), THE ROW PYTHON LEGGINGS (\$4,995; BERGDORF GOODMAN, NYC), AND HER OWN JUSTIN ROPER BOOTS.



outrageous, but it could be perfect for the rodeo,"

says Maren, who plans to come back to Houston for an annual show-down this spring. She whips out her BlackBerry, takes a picture, and sends it to a childhood friend who lives a few blocks away for approval. "Getting a second opinion from my best friends back home makes all the difference, wherever I am."—C.N. *view >410*