

## **A blend of new and old**

*Lucie Muir*

*Designers have found a creative way to circumvent today's shortage of real vintage, says Lucie Muir*

In May, when the population of wild sea bass went into rapid decline, British fishermen were quick to suggest a variety of scaly alternatives so stocks could recover. And although rare fish and fashion might seem a rather odd analogy - designer Michael Teperson's fabulous stingray-skin clutch aside - if the rules on fishing quotas were applied to those casting their nets too frequently on eBay, rare pieces of Balenciaga, Yves Saint Laurent (or even the aforementioned Teperson, since "vintage" is no longer reserved for historic brands), we might enjoy a bountiful catch once more.

For as ever more vintage dealers migrate to the internet, the supply of coveted Chanel and prized Pucci has sunk to endangered species levels. And with Matthew Williamson's probable departure from the historic Italian fashion house, expect to see a surge of interest in past-Pucci collections all over again.

"I'm a pro when it comes to snagging a really unusual piece on e Bay, but people are a lot more clued-up about vintage these days," says Kate Schelter, fashion stylist and founder of the New York-based luxury consulting agency that bears her name. "As a result, it's much harder to find those rare 20th-century designs."

Luckily, however, an increasing number of 21st century designers have come up with a creative solution to the problem: call it "contemporary vintage".

"I love vintage, but rather than directly copy the shapes and cuts of another era, I'd prefer to accentuate that weighty feel of retro clothing through heavy, modern silks and the like," says Erdem Moralioglu, the London-based women's wear designer who is a poster child for the trend. In some instances, for example, Moralioglu will embroider the surface layer of a dress with a mix of different embellishments including antique horsehair and jet-black Swarovski crystals for a more weighty feel. He cites Taroni, one of Italy's oldest silk producers, as his main source for the vintage-inspired floral prints in his eponymous collection.

Meanwhile, there's a hint of early Ossie Clark about Brazilian Isabela Capeto's eponymous label, with its 1970s-style maxi shapes and bold patterns inspired by the skyscrapers of Sao Paulo. "I think when you produce a print-driven collection such as this, some pieces are bound to end up looking as if they are vintage," says Capeto.

"It has become increasingly hard to find real vintage pieces in pristine condition -clothes are often torn or stained beyond repair," says Carmen Busquets, founder of the luxury shopping portal CoutureLab.com. As a result she offers brands such as Michele and Olivier Chatenet of Parisian fashion label E2, whose signature is to rip a vintage dress apart and either embellish it with Swarovski crystals or print on top of an existing fabric, and Duro Olowu, who created a limited series of three dresses hand-made from rare vintage silks, each one over-dyed with novel print effects.

Earlier this year, designer duo Clements Ribeiro teamed up with their long-time knitwear collaborator Karen Nicol to produce a limited edition of re-conditioned vintage knits. For this, the designers delved into their collection of antique beading and jewellery amassed over the past 10 years. Victorian beads, couture embroidery swatches, Bakelite jewellery, pearls, art deco buckles and plastic corsages are just a few of the details to appear on cardigans and sweaters - of which only 200 have been produced.

And it's not just fashion designers who are turning vintage on its head. For those in search of collectable vintage jewellery, the House of Lavande, based in Palm Beach, Florida, has more

than 5,000 items - from colourful keystone crystal designs by Schreiner to rarities by Christian Dior and a new "Remnants" collection: one-off necklaces and bracelets, which Tracy Smith reworks from early 20th-century clasps and stones. "I like to layer strands of pearls and precious stones from different eras together," says Smith. "It gives a new dimension to the term vintage." The point, says Mark Baverstock, head buyer for international women's wear at London-based designer store Matches, is that vintage shoppers are now looking for designers such as Milan-based Angelo Kat-sapis who can take old references and inject new craftsmanship and modernity into a collection: "It's this fresh vintage aesthetic, which people are starting to invest in. And like contemporary art, the newer the label, the more 'vintage' value it has in the long run."



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