

Anglophile Designers

Venetia Rainey explores how Anglophile and indigenous designers appropriate the idea of 'Britishness' to their designs

Isn't it great to be English? Rain, mud, cups of tea, countryside institutions such as Harry Hall, Barbour and Hunter... It's not that we're ashamed, just not particularly proud. The only time it is acceptable to sport any of the above is when looking good is apparently not the issue at hand. When walking the dog, for example, or popping round to granny's.

But for some, the traditional English style is exactly what they aspire to emulate. And when I say 'traditional', I mean the bizarrely romanticised version of our countryside lifestyle espoused by designers such as Ralph Lauren. His flagship store in New York is located in the Rhinelander Mansion, a shrine to all things supposedly upper class and English. Oil paintings of horses and sullen children adorn every mahogany wall; polished shooting guns sit on shelves; cashmere scarves drape themselves over stag antlers; the whole store is based around a warped idea of the local Yorkshire farmer on a Hollywood budget.

This Anglophilia is reflected in his designs too. From monocles and fitted tweed jackets to riding crops and boots, some of Lauren's favoured details are incredibly English in their origin, even if their preppy presentation and jockey associations make them incredibly American in result.

Burberry Prorsum is another designer powerhouse caught up in a love affair with all things English. Established by Thomas Burberry in 1856, the company became famous for gabardine, a comfortable yet waterproof fabric for riding, shooting, and other soggy country pursuits. In 1914, Burberry invented the trench coat as practical wear in World War I for officers in the trenches. Today, Burberry prides itself on being a distinctly British label, using Kate Moss in several of its campaigns, and with Yorkshire born-and-bred Christopher Bailey as Creative Director. Their latest collection was inspired by his "own garden in Yorkshire, and a Thames & Hudson book on eccentric Brits called Garden People - never

types to be daunted by a bit of mud." The looks, however, remain clean, muted, and classic, retaining their international appeal rather than indulging any real "eccentricity".

A fashion article on Anglophiles could never be complete without a mention of (to use the fashion media's term) Dame Vivienne Westwood. The fashion world loves her. Throughout her collections and career she has never abandoned 'Britishness'. Of course, we are talking a wholly different strand of Britishness from anything that Ralph Lauren would even consider touching with a polo stick. We are talking 60s Britain, the era of punk, tartan, political consciousness, rebellion, safety pins and Union Jack flags. This is a woman who set up a separate line called 'Anglomania', comprising of tartan suits, ball gowns and fake fur corsets. Even her logo, an orb floating in a ring, reflects the orb of the British Crown Jewels, but with a punk twist. It is also a very clear reworking of the Harris Tweed logo, an opaque reference to how much her work is influenced by one of the most quintessential English fabrics available.

There are other designers who give the rest of the world a glimpse of what the idea of Britishness means to them. Luella has an obsession with all things equestrian, whilst Dolce and Gabbana recently ran a campaign which depicted a group of people decked entirely in tartan standing outside a country house, complete with dogs, horses, a Land Rover and a very old but proud looking lady in a checked headscarf. It is interesting that in this day and age, as the sense of what makes someone British becomes increasingly intangible and indefinable, the most notorious British and Anglophile designers feel the need to recapture days gone by in order to keep hold of that essence.

Clockwise from top: Burberry Prorsum campaign, Paul Smith, Ralph Lauren



Ones to watch Hannah Smith

MODEL: FREJA BEHA

Discovered by chance in her native Denmark, Freja Beja Erichsen is edging her way up **models.com's** list of the Top 50 models to watch. The 21 year-old is a seasoned professional now, having become the face of Jil Sander at the tender age of 17, but 2009 marks her real steps into the big league. In the past month, Beja opened and closed the SS09 Chanel couture show, and was the subject of editorials from prestigious magazines such as Vogue Italia, Harper's Bazaar and Dazed & Confused.

Famed for her lithe, androgynous figure, Beja's boyish features and airy demeanour echo the hero-in-chic culture of the early 90s. Intelligent and self-aware in interviews, her future is bright.

TREND: 80s

The Spring/Summer shows are a time for frivolity. Giles was inspired by graphic designers of the 80's for his collection, which even paid homage to Pacman. Stella presented modern power dressing that was sexy and androgynous, with casual tailoring and strong shoulders.

Elsewhere, neon colour blocking, simple body-con shapes and shimmering fabrics were accessorised with outrageously oversized bows and jewellery for maximum impact. Heart prints at Moschino also echoed such childish girlishness. We all chant: Long live the 80s.



DESIGNER: SADO

Sado is an up-and-coming label that has made an impact in the past few years on the off-schedules of both London Fashion week and its Muscovite equivalent. The clothing is clearly designed with an acute sense of commercial viability, and as such the lines are clear, simple and feminine. Milanese designer Carlotta Gherzi is the creative director, and claims that the label is about "freedom in building shapes and abstract figures without following any rules or geometric laws". Translated into fabric, this equates to mixing wide and narrow shapes with easy, flowing effects. Contemporary references to Stella McCartney and Marni are evident in Sado's collections.



ACCESSORY: HEADPIECE

Chanel rarely disappoints and this season's collection epitomised the exquisite decadence that is the very nature of couture. Lagerfeld's partnership with Japanese hairdresser Kamo truly lifted the collection beyond all other shows. Headwear is often explored as an aesthetic tool that pushes the boundaries of accessorising. Kamo's pieces were pure white; origami garland crowns of flower cor-sages and ribbons that were cut with precision craftsmanship and intricate detail. The effect was fresh simplicity that rescued the look from mundane minimalism.

