

STYLE

CRUISING ALONG

Every year in the icy winter months, designers unveil their resort collections. Initially aimed at the jet-set fashionista who escapes to warmer climates, resort fashion has now taken on a whole new meaning in a woman's wardrobe, discovers SAHAR KHAN

What is resort?

Often for winter holidays, that corridor of unhampered time that requires itself to be trifled with, offerings from a regular wardrobe just won't do. Whether it's a bikini for the coral-laden beaches of Maldives, a parka for the slopes of Aspen, or an evening gown for a black-tie dinner in Rome, resort, the special collection designed for such escapes, is essential.

Once comprising of bespoke pieces designers created for wealthy clients to wear on getaways, resort, also known as cruise wear, has morphed into a regular, even necessary part of the fashion world.

"Now, more than ever, there is a new season-less attitude about the collection," says designer Michael Kors, whose creations have come to define a contemporary jet-set style. "A woman can wear boots and a leather jacket with a summer dress and still feel glamorous."

The current popularity of resort, which is shown during June and hits stores in November, is due in part to a convergence of creative and business forces that have turned a niche market into a mainstream requirement.

"It used to be that resort clothes would be shown for people leaving on vacation," says Caroline Rennolds Milbank, author of *Resort Fashion: Style in Sun-Drenched Climates*. "Now resort is worn for non-resort purposes." And that's partly because it helps designers present clothing ideas for the whole year, not just seasons.

"Resort serves as a creative lab," says Jason Wu, the 27-year-old designer who became a household name after Michelle Obama chose his one-shouldered white

gown for the presidential inaugural ball. "It is a chance to elaborate on ideas from fall and explore new concepts that I can continue with for spring."

Resort helps build sales beyond seasons. "Commercially, resort fills the gap between major collections on the selling floor, keeping the brand visible throughout the year," adds Wu, who showed chiffon dresses and embroidered blouses for resort 2010. "It's vital to support year-round business."

Birth of resort

In the 1920s, European designers like Coco Chanel and Elsa Schiaparelli custom-made outfits like riding ensembles and beach pyjamas for clients headed to warmer climates. After World War II, the advent of air travel and a jet-set lifestyle combined with a growth in swimming pools and patio culture helped proliferate resort fashion. A blend of boho-chic and classic elements, it was based on the idea of escape and comfort, and included tunics and kaftans, cardigans and loose pants.

Images of celebrities sporting the look added glamour to resort's appeal: Brigitte Bardot frolicking on a beach in a waisted shirt, bikini and headband, and more recently, stars like Chloé Sevigny in a scallop-edged short suit and boater hat at a polo match.

Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, however,



CHANEL
RESORT 09/10



CHLOÉ

JASON WU

MICHAEL
KORS

remains resort's most influential figure. "There is a picture of John and Jackie walking barefoot along the beach," Milbank says, referring to a 1957 photograph where the future First Lady (at the time) wears high-waist khaki trousers and an untucked Oxford shirt. "It made them seem more relatable to the public."

Indian influence

In the 1960s, hippies descended on India in search of enlightenment and a good time. The country also became a pilgrimage for glitterati bent on following the hippie trail, albeit in more glamorous attire. Whether meditating in a dhoti or smoking hookah in a chikan-embroidered kurta, visitors, in an effort to pay homage to their host country, began mixing ethnic with western clothing. Indian aesthetics, with their vibrant colours, diaphanous fabrics and intricate embroideries, were seamlessly weaved into resort clothing, creating a hippie deluxe look.

A continuing Indian inspiration was evident at Chanel's 2010 resort compilation. Along Venice's famed Lido boardwalk was a charcoal mini and coat-tail jacket layered with kinari-like gold-leaf pattern so delicate it seemed it would flake off with the brush of a lover's palm.

Growing popularity

Decades after its birth, resort has evolved into non-holiday pieces like cocktail dresses, tailored skirts and even suits. This means more choices not only for global jaunts, but also for daily use. "Resort is a good investment because it is not as trend-driven as the rest of fashion," says Milbank. "The clothes have a degree of classicism that lasts. You can wear them year after year." She adds, "Simply put, resort is growing because people want to buy it." This evolution into multipurpose fashion means resort can be mixed with ready-to-wear pieces and haute couture.

"I have always loved designing resort and things that have a resort mentality," says Kors, whose resort 2010 presentation includes a kimono-sleeved coat, a cropped turtleneck and batik-printed dresses draped like sarongs, which could easily go from Gstaad to Goa.

"Resort taps into nostalgia because it reminds us of vacations and fun, happy times," says Milbank. "It puts people in a good mood." ■

INDIAN RESORT

Aparna Badlani, owner, Zoya
DEFINING RESORT

Resort fashion in India is still undefined. Unlike abroad, where there is a distinct resort line presented between autumn and spring, in India it is still a nascent collection. I think it also has to do more with the sensibility of a particular designer. It's about style with a carefree attitude—perfect for lounging in Goa or Kerala. The look constitutes easy shapes with soft draping and comfortable silhouettes. Fabrics used

are linens, cottons, georgettes and chiffons.

Also, resort fashion is available all through the year in India—whether it is the temperate climate that the majority of the country enjoys through the year, the lack of defined seasons, or the fact that resort hits stores in Europe in December—which is India's rather busy bridal season.



WHO

The designers can be divided into two categories

Easy resort: Characterised by fluid and ethereal drapes in soft, often organic fabrics. An earthy zen palette, it's devoid of embellishments and instead focuses on the natural progression of the fabric. Wendell Rodricks, Savio Jon, James Ferreira and Anuj Sharma are the designers in this category.

Club resort: This is characterised by the glamour of the destination party girl—from Ibiza to Goa, this is a sexed-up version with prints, colour and bling. Minidresses and skirts, embellished bikinis and Indichic kaftans and tunics. Monisha Jaising, Malini Ramani and Tarun Tahiliani have perfected this look.



POPULAR TRENDS

A focus on the shoulders: Whether it's the '80s power shoulder, a bare shoulder or a Grecian one-shoulder look.

Quiet shimmer: Sequins and diamanté give

way to subtle shine from fabrics like silk and leather, which is the order of the day.

Prints rule: Paisleys, florals and abstracts.

Waist-defining belts: Give a woman curves.

BUYER'S ADVICE

Every woman must own a pair of linen palazzo pants in a neutral shade. A long, tiered white dress and a pair of flat tie-up sandals are the basics in a resort wardrobe.