

## STYLE

# WHAT'S THE VINTAGE?

*Vintage fashion has become synonymous with individual style. But how do you define it? SAHAR KHAN breaks down this new obsession with the old*

**T**he aphorism 'One man's trash is another man's treasure' has never been truer than in these economically mellow and environmentally conscious times. We speak of treasures buried in attics and, with growing alacrity, housed in speciality stores. The philosophy of reuse has become trendy and vintage fashion is in.

### WHAT IS VINTAGE?

Essentially, second-hand clothes and accessories from the period between the '20s and the '80s are referred to as 'vintage'. Garments more than 100 years old are considered antique.

The popularity of vintage has been on the upswing since the late '90s. Celebrities like Julia Roberts, who accepted her Oscar in vintage Valentino, and television shows like *Sex and the City* championed its cause, says Molly Sorkin, assistant curator at The Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in New York. The ubiquity of high street brands like H&M and Zara has led to a loss of fashion identity and many have found vintage to be the answer.

"Vintage fabric has a story," says Shaila Freyer, owner of Charm Ecole, a vintage boutique in San Francisco. "It adds mystery... a tale," she says. The half-Indian, half-Argentine personal shopper jets around the world in search of inimitable finds for her clients.

Globally, the trend has mutated in accordance with indigenous cultures and personalities. Fashion capitals have spawned their own vintage icons: Londoner Kate Moss exemplified the trend to

post-hippie chic perfection with a '70s gold tunic, black belt and mud-encrusted wellies at an outdoor concert; New Yorker Chloë Sevigny has a knack of looking chic in old pieces, such as a baby pink Emanuel Ungaro dress printed with grey roses that she wore to an event. A spare bedroom, used as a closet, in Azzaro designer Vanessa Seward's Paris pied-à-terre is lined with vintage Yves Saint Laurent gowns.

### VINTAGE IN INDIA

Locally, fashion-forward women interpret the trend according to their preferences, creating new ensembles from old: saris unfurl as gowns; embroidered dupattas into minidresses; flared ghagras are shortened. Luckily, India's rich history of textiles and jewellery offers a

breadth of unique pieces to choose from. Indeed, many of these pieces have been passed down in families from generation to generation.

For good reason: some garments, like wine, get better with age. This was evident last year at an exhibition at The Museum at FIT, which highlighted the East's influence on Western fashion. Standout pieces included saris from the late '40s belonging to Princess Niloufer of Hyderabad. Influenced by her childhood in France, she commissioned couture houses like Lanvin to design saris reflecting Western style. The Princess was ahead of her time: a frosty silk chiffon sari with flowers in seed beads, silver thread and sequins would look as contemporary today in a nightclub in Mumbai as it did 60 years ago in a palace in Hyderabad.







**MAITHILI AHLUWALIA**  
ON EUROPEAN VINTAGE

*The stylish owner of lifestyle store Bungalow 8 is known for her eclectic taste*

“Vintage is more than second-hand clothes. It is about referencing techniques, materials, silhouettes and designers from another era, typically the '20s to the '80s. Vintage can, but does not have to, bear a label. It represents a vital link to our personal and collective histories, like my Pierre Cardin coat, which will be an eternal connection to my late grandmother, my mentor and style icon, and remain symbolic of how she lived and dressed.

**VINTAGE TODAY**

People’s perception of vintage has altered due to the endorsement of several Hollywood style icons. It has also benefited from the need for environmental and financial conservation. The desire for vintage represents a backlash against the homogenisation of fashion. With everyone looking and dressing the same, people are attracted to vintage as it fulfills a desire to be unique. The success and record prices of YSL’s collection at an auction in Paris, particularly during a recession, is testament to this.

**BUYER’S ADVICE**

Be patient. Frequent visits to eBay, thrift stores and flea markets are a must if one is truly interested in rare finds. Sizing is another issue. Many older garments were custom-made and don’t have sizing labels, or the old sizes often differ from modern



**FAVOURITE VINTAGE PIECES**

1. Adjustable sunburst rhinestone and faux jade ring (1950s-1960s)
2. Swiss-made rhinestone bracelet-watch with quartz movement
3. Onyx earrings, Trifari (1950s)
4. Mesh evening bag, Paco Rabanne
5. Gold-petal necklace (1960s-1970s)
6. Industrial tool chair (1940s)

**“Vintage is much more than second-hand clothes. It is about referencing another era”**

ones. It can sometimes be difficult to find the right size. Beware of reproductions—and people trying to pass off new pieces as old ones. If you see multiples of the same piece at once, be warned, for it’s rare to find two identical pieces. Research the period of interest. And store carefully, as it’s essential to ensure the longevity of vintage wear.

**BEST SHOPPING**

My main pick for vintage shopping in Europe is **Paris**. It’s one of the few places where carrying an Hermès Birkin bag to the market, a fresh baguette peeking out above the rim, is not unusual.

**Didier Ludot** in the Palais Royal is the reigning king of vintage. This is where you come to find inspiration and admire vintage couture. While ruffling through museum-quality fashion (everything from Givenchy couture to early YSL), you might stumble upon an Art Deco evening clutch

with a bamboo closure at a somewhat modest price. Tel: 0033-1-42960656

**Scarlett**, just off the Avenue Montaigne, is another great bet. Though tiny and cluttered, it can throw up a few surprises, like a tweedy Chanel Sac Chine. Tel: 0033-1-56890300

**Gabrielle Geppert** is a much-loved favourite amongst fashionistas for its well-edited selection of vintage Chanel and Louis Vuitton accessories, as well as relative unknowns at competitive prices. Tel: 0033-01-42615352

**Tiany Chambard** on the Left Bank is filled with Lucite and Bakelite jewellery from the '40s to the '80s. Tel: 0033-01-43297315

**Les 3 Marches de Catherine B** has an enormous collection of Chanel and Hermès clothing and accessories, including a selection of over 50 Kelly bags that range in price from \$2,500 to \$6,000. Tel: 0033-1-43547418.”





**SANGITA KATHIWADA**  
ON INDIAN VINTAGE

*The owner of Mélange mixes family heirlooms with edgy designs from the country's young talent*

**DEFINING VINTAGE**

"Vintage is a very sensual word, conjuring up emotions and memories of a bygone era. That's one of the reasons why, despite living in a cosmopolitan city, my life has a lot of vintage elements. My bedroom, for example, has a luxurious red velvet vintage love seat, a stool where I perch my feet for a reflexology massage, and a wardrobe which I've filled with jewellery and textiles that have been passed down through generations.

**"In my mind, vintage is a very sensual word, conjuring up emotions of a bygone era"**

I would divide Indian vintage into two categories—rural and luxury. The most beautiful vintage textiles worn by village women, painstakingly woven and hand-embroidered, did not find their way to the backs of the royal or noble ladies, and ornaments in silver and gold worn by nomadic men and women, as well as vessels, baskets and pottery, could find a place in the world's museums.

Luxury vintage includes pieces commissioned by royal families. I remember, as a new bride 22 years ago, being invited to visit my husband's grandaunt, the Rani of Kalasia. I wore an emerald and diamond necklace gifted to me by my husband. Imagine my reaction when I walked into the living room and in a 60-year-old portrait,

the Maharaja of Porbandar was wearing the same piece! What's charming about vintage in India is that we live it in many ways. I can't wait for an occasion to wear my grandmother's or mother's brocades and chiffons.

**BUYER'S ADVICE**

Look for pieces that suit your style. Don't just imitate a look you have seen, and do mix it with modern pieces to make it your own. Wearing head-to-toe vintage is a definite no—it'll look like a costume!

**BEST SHOPPING**

The best way to purchase Indian vintage is in the royal style, with vendors visiting you at home with boxes of treasures." ■



**FAVOURITE VINTAGE PIECES**

1. Silver antique mirror from Kashmir
2. Silver framed portrait of the Maharaja of Porbandar
3. Leather footstool, Kathiwada Mansion
4. Salwar with gold embroidery from Palanpur
5. & 6. Real gold and silver embroidered blouse, silver brocade ghagra; both belonging to Kathiwada's mother

**VOGUE'S VINTAGE SHOPLIST**

**Phillips Antiques, Mumbai:** Furniture, lithographs, engravings and aquatints. Tel: 022-22020564

**The Raj Company, Mumbai:** Restored colonial furniture. 022-25623665

**Chor Bazaar, Mumbai:** Anything from old Bollywood posters to dysfunctional gramophones and Parsi furniture.

**Natesans Antiquarts, Mumbai:** Paintings and sculpture in wood, metal and stone. Tel: 022-22852700.

**Saudades, Goa:** Colonial furniture of Indo-Portuguese, French and British origin. Tel: 0832-2409873.

**Vintage and Classic Car Club of India:** Vintage Mercedes-Benz, Bentley and Chevrolet. Tel: 022-22664773.

**Vithaldas Exports, Hyderabad:** Vintage jewellery from across the country. Tel: 040-24577758.

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