

## TREND



Clockwise from top left: Bottega Veneta spring/summer 2021; Celine spring/summer 2021; Naomi Campbell and Kate Moss in Versace; Marc Jacobs for Perry Ellis spring/summer 1993



# Back to the future

The '90s are back. From minimalism to the punk spirit of grunge and everything in between, **Malika Dalamal** looks at how a decade full of extreme contrasts is the perfect inspiration for our current world in flux

**T**he '90s are a hard decade to pin down. While they gave rise to the glossy, Versace-clad celebrity supermodels, they also gave us the waif-like Kate Moss. We wore preppy LA-centric garments so brilliantly parodied in the film *Clueless* (1995), yet also saw the birth of grunge when Marc Jacobs sent models down the runway in printed granny dresses and Doc Martens. Meanwhile, sportswear became acceptable daywear long before athleisure was a thing.

And today, as we all crave nostalgia and escapism in the midst of the strangeness of a pandemic, it's no wonder that designers have returned to a time that offers something for every mood and situation. James Abraham, the man behind Instagram ac-

count Nineties Anxiety (@90sanxiety), an online time capsule of the decade, believes we look to the past to figure out how to (or how not to) do things in the future. "To me, it's almost like things get better the second or third time around," he says.

Tracksuits, a staple of '90s hip-hop artists, have become the official uniform of quarantine. Back then, it was the Adidas Firebird with its iconic stripes and sportswear emblazoned with the logos of Tommy Hilfiger or Polo Ralph Lauren. This time around we are seeing nostalgic sportswear elevated with luxe details—because while comfort is key in 2021, we still want to look good. Hedi Slimane brought back slouchy tracksuits in luxurious silks and cashmere and styled almost every look at Celine with a

logoed baseball cap. At Gucci we saw monogram-printed trackpants and retro football jersey tops. And at Miu Miu urban elements from the '90s added to evening wear, like a pretty pink ruffled shirt tucked into low-slung joggers and kitten-heeled tennis shoes.

In the mid '90s, the modernity of brands like Calvin Klein, Helmut Lang and Jil Sander provided a thrilling shift of mood, a stark contrast to the excessive glamour of the '80s. For spring/summer, designers including Bottega Veneta and Loewe referenced the soulful simplicity of '90s minimalism with classic silhouettes—ribbed knitwear, mid-length skirts, understated tank tops and slinky slip dresses—that bring to mind the impeccable '90s icon Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy.

"It probably comes from a need to be less fussy in general. Tough times call for more simple pieces," believes Gaelle Drevet, founder of insider favourite The Frankie Shop, known for its "minimalist, relaxed fashion and more muted colour palettes. We are leaning into the casual-meets-corporate lifestyle with tailored blazers paired with shorts, casual tees and stirrup leggings, and blending sweatshirts and hoodies more seamlessly into our closets. Creating a less conventional mix of styles feels like bending the rules, which is very '90s in itself."

Meanwhile, Natalie Kingham, global fashion officer at *MatchesFashion.com*, has seen trends appearing from the punk underground. "Oversized outerwear and stomping boots styled with printed polo necks and leggings or a nylon skirt. Marine Serre and Chopova Lowena speak to '90s grunge, along with boots from brands such as Bottega Veneta, Burberry and Ganni. It is this idea of oversized outerwear mixed with a slim silhouette—a feeling of real-life comfort and cool."

And it's not just comfort driving this trend. Clare Coulson, fashion journalism tutor at Central Saint Martins, adds that there are social correlations: "The gender-blurring of grunge and even the spirit of that time is probably something that a new generation really connects with. The '90s were a pretty downbeat time with global recessions. Obviously, in our current turmoil, that feels quite relatable."

But it's not all doom and gloom. There's a sense of much-needed fun and feel-good nostalgia emerging through micro trends like transparencies, bralettes under blazers, joyful splashes of bubblegum pink and barely-there black dresses that are similar to the one held together with safety pins that catapulted Elizabeth Hurley to fame in 1994. Kingham predicts that as we move out of the pandemic, we will all want to dress up again. "Think feminine dresses and heels, which feels very reminiscent of *Sex And The City's* Carrie Bradshaw in the late '90s."

Here's hoping.

## ERA-DEFINING

Three women channel the various moods of the '90s



THE MINIMALIST

### PRAGYA KAPOOR

PRODUCER AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST

Kapoor's '90s-inspired minimalist style is somewhat unintentional because when it comes to her fashion choices, comfort always comes first. The former actor and model turned film producer and environmentalist is happiest in a pair of Nudie or Agolde jeans, a denim jacket and a crisp T-shirt from The Classic T-Shirt Company or Citizen Wolf, a classic look which she dresses up with '90s accessories including headbands, chokers, kitten heels and big hoop earrings. She cites Cindy Crawford, the supermodel known for her cast iron determination and professionalism, as her style icon from the decade. "It's not just her effortless style. I admire women who are bold and independent," she says. >

TREND



FUSS-FREE FEMININITY

## ARPITA MEHTA

DESIGNER

Mehta spent the '90s poring over images of the 'Supers' (Naomi Campbell, Cindy Crawford, Christy Turlington, Linda Evangelista and Claudia Schiffer) in any international magazines she could get her hands on. As a schoolgirl during the decade, she was at an impressionable age and was influenced by fashion editorials, glitzy Versace campaigns and the supermodels' off-duty looks. Her biggest takeaways from the '90s were feminine dresses, as well as leggings, oversized T-shirts and a timeless leather biker jacket, upgraded today to a Belstaff version. Her look back then was punctuated with big, gold jewellery. All these years later, drawing attention to one statement piece underlines her style.



PREP- SCHOOL STAR

## ALLIA AL-RUFAl

STYLIST

A true child of the '90s, Al-Rufai grew up looking to supermodels and the protagonists of movies like *Clueless* (1995) and *Romy And Michele's High School Reunion* (1997) for inspiration. She remembers begging her mother to buy her a pair of Patrick Cox Wannabees, the chunky loafer with its own '90s cult following. Sadly, her mother refused, but today the stylist and fashion consultant is revisiting the decade on her own terms—in vintage Galliano slip dresses, preppy skirts, crop tops and classic Reebok sneakers. "I have even pulled out a Paco Rabanne bralette and some jersey pieces from way back. Somehow, they don't look dated." ■