

“Oh my god! I love your skirt, where did you get it?”

“Erm, it was my mom’s in the 80s.”

“Vintage! So adorable.”

Although Mean Girl, Regina George had quite a patronising tone during this interaction, her last sentence could not be truer today. Vintage is indeed, adorable and it’s back with a bang!

Fashion historians call it the “20-year cycle”, referring to the approximate time span it takes for past styles to look fresh and interesting again. We’ve seen this with the Y2k and McBling trends that haven taken the Internet by storm lately; the bright colours and inventive layering characterising their resurgence with the same kind of maximalism that defined them at the turn of the century. It’s classic escapism and there’s no surprise that it is trending right now— after a global pandemic, half a decade of deeply entrenched racial injustices and the ever looming climate crisis. Consumers are turning to the past to seek comfort, and these cyclical fashion trends are allowing them to wear their nostalgia on their sleeve.

From a more socio-political lens; two years of the Covid pandemic caused the fashion industry to weather through several crises, that resulted in it losing much of it’s glam and lustre. In this regard, the first domino to tip over was the decline in economic profits of fashion companies, which fell by approximately 90% in 2020, as people stayed indoors and had little reason to shop for clothes or any other discretionary items. To reconcile with these losses, several brands cancelled orders from their factories and even refused to pay overseas suppliers for orders that had already been placed: thus triggering a garment worker crisis in countries such as Myanmar, Cambodia, Bangladesh and India, where millions of labourers faced reduced working hours and even unemployment. And through it all, the climate crisis was always on consumers’ minds, to the extent that the supposed “sustainability” of fast fashion brands was not fooling anyone.

It was amidst this perfect storm, that vintage fashion was resuscitated, and it is now on its way to becoming a lifestyle. According to a recent report by second-hand clothing retail platform, ThredUp, the global second-hand apparel market is forecasted to grow 127% by 2026. Hence, I wanted to delve deeper, find out more about this emerging phenomenon

that claims that it is here to stay. So, I decided to visit Flamingo's, a vintage clothing store in Cardiff.

Having lived in Cardiff for a year now, I'd heard a lot about the place, but never really gotten around to visiting it, especially since I, admittedly, have struggled to get off the fast fashion bandwagon. In my mind, vintage embodied a very specific aesthetic (think, artsy and boho) and I just didn't think it was my cup of tea.

With these preconceived notions, I walked into the store and was instantly greeted by the cutest bell-sleeved, cropped blazer. It's hem was lined with colourful buttons, and it managed to dispel all perceptions I had about the vintage 'aesthetic'. It was whimsical, yet versatile and I could see myself styling it in a number of ways. This was even before I learnt that this particular piece was a vintage Moschino and my jaw dropped to the floor. Here, I also had the pleasure of meeting Amy, who showed me some of her favourite pieces from the store's collection, post which she indulged my questions.

Still intrigued by the aforementioned ThredUp statistic, I wanted her perspective on whether second-hand fashion was here to stay. She most definitely agreed that it was, but not before clarifying that it was in no way a 'new' phenomenon. "It's always been around", she said, "but it's definitely been getting a lot more traction, since most fashion trends today have sort of a retro feel to them." I thought this was quite an interesting observation, especially when one considers Kate Moss' iconic outfit for New York Fashion Week in 2003: a pale yellow, off-the-shoulder dress by 1950s couturier, Jean Dessès. This sartorial choice was certainly a statement, and caused people to flock to flea markets and second-hand stores. However, this didn't last long, because shopping vintage is no easy feat. And after Moss teamed up with TopShop to create clothes inspired by her favourite looks (including the Dessès dress), vintage was pushed back into obscurity because, let's face it, mass produced is better; it is cheaper and there's plenty of products for everyone to get their hands on.

Today, the resurrection of vintage is the result of a more evolved discourse that heavily considers fast fashion and the unsustainability of it all. Of course, this facet was an important talking point of my conversation with Amy. "Yes! Vintage is obviously a more sustainable alternative to the clothes sold by fast fashion retailers, not just because it gives a whole new life to your clothes, but also because it evidently stands the test of time. These clothes were made to last." At this juncture, I also needed to address the question of accessibility, since I've known vintage clothes to be a lot more expensive than

their fast-fashion counterparts. To this, she answered, “Well yes, I agree that these clothes are a bit on the pricier side, but they’ve clearly lasted a much longer time, which could be seen as a proof of quality.”

However, what struck me most prominently through the length of my discussion with Amy, was the part where she was showing me some of her favourite denim jackets from the latest collection. There were some with intricate embroidery and others with funky fashion pins, but each one was unique. This, I believe, is probably the most compelling facet of thrifting; the promise that every piece you own is yours only, not a mass produced black crop top that every second person on the street is wearing, but a piece with individuality stitched into its very threads.