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Why white is right for spring

Ignore the old rules about seasonal colours



From left, spring/summer 2015 from: Antonio Berardi; Whistles; Chloé; Valentino; Richard Nicoll

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David Hayes JANUARY 9 2015

Sometimes it's nice to turn the page, start again, hit refresh. It's a thought that many designers seem to have shared for this spring, with pure white underpinning numerous new season collections.

"White has an optimism to it," says Richard Nicoll, adding that the palette of his latest collection "was designed to induce a mood of dreamlike calm and meditation. The white was a nod to 1990s minimalism and also to a clean serene new beginning."

"White reflects a need for freshness, for simplicity, for renewal," says Paula Reed, creative director at mytheresa.com. "There is something irresistibly gentle about all the whites: the lace, the broderie anglaise, the seersucker, the crisp cottons. Heaven knows, the world is short on gentleness right now."

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And, as the new year begins, that touch of gentleness comes in many forms: the elegant minimalism of Haider Ackermann's tailoring, the delicate romance of Valentino's lace gowns, Chloé's billowy bohemian dresses and boxy tabards and layered shifts in off-white at Céline.

But the latest twist to the white trend is that you don't have to wait until high summer to wear it. White could be just what your wardrobe needs right now, even in the frostiest of winter months. "White continues to be relevant because it is both seasonless and timeless. It's a staple," says Tomoko Ogura, senior fashion director of Barneys New York.

And you don't need a summer tan to pull it off, according to Reed, who says: "As I get older I think white is kinder to the skin than black. The contrast, against even the palest of skin, always manages to conjure a glimmer of a glow."

Bosse Myhr, designerwear buying manager at Selfridges, is also a fan of this unseasonal shade. "Separates make white easier to wear for early spring," he says. "And it touches many different trends for the season, right through to evening gowns."

Yes, the new white has not only crossed the seasons but the day-to-night divide, too. "The red carpet has totally embraced white," says Antonio Berardi, who sent out a finale of seven predominantly white looks for spring, from sporty separates to full-length organza evening dresses. "It has become a bestseller for gowns; it really is a statement as bold as any of the brightest colours."

Clare Waight Keller, creative director of Chloé, is also enamoured with the white dress. "It has come to symbolise Chloé's fresh, modern, feminine spirit; there is something both daring and pure about it." Waight Keller opened her spring/summer show with two season-defining white lacy dresses: "White dresses are moving towards becoming a wardrobe staples," she says. "They are the equivalent of the little black dress."

Neither is black the only go-to non-colour for the avant-garde any longer. Young British designer and Dover Street Market favourite Phoebe English has also championed all-white for spring. "I used white in the collection to convey the notion of purity and clarity," says the Central St Martins graduate. "There are a lot of very detailed textiles and prints in it so I used white as a compositional device, a silence in the visual storm. I think white works best when it's constructed in heavy texture so the lightness and visual information of the two elements play off one another."

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With this interplay of colour and texture in mind, which key pieces make wise investments? Perhaps the best suggestions come from Ogura, who recommends accent pieces rather than total looks: "White accessories feel fresh. White shoes and bags complement the prints and patterns that emerged for spring. In accessories, white can, counter intuitively, serve as a pop of colour because it's unexpected and bold."

At Selfridges, Myhr recommends "crop-tailored jackets and A-line skirts by the likes of Victoria Beckham and Alexander Wang at Balenciaga".

Jane Shepherdson, chief executive of UK clothing brand Whistles, used white details to add a fresh, uncomplicated feel to technical fabrics. She's also predicting a white jeans revival. "White jeans have been popular for the Instagram street-stylers for a while but they are now filtering through. A pair in a girlfriend fit feel new. Wear them with a navy jumper and black Chelsea boots for an updated feel," she says.

She concludes: "It is a pendulum-swing moment. The past few seasons have been about an infusion of colour. Now this is a time to refresh and rethink."

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