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Out of the past

Following Burberry's success, more brands are delving into their archives for inspiration



David Hayes SEPTEMBER 30 2011

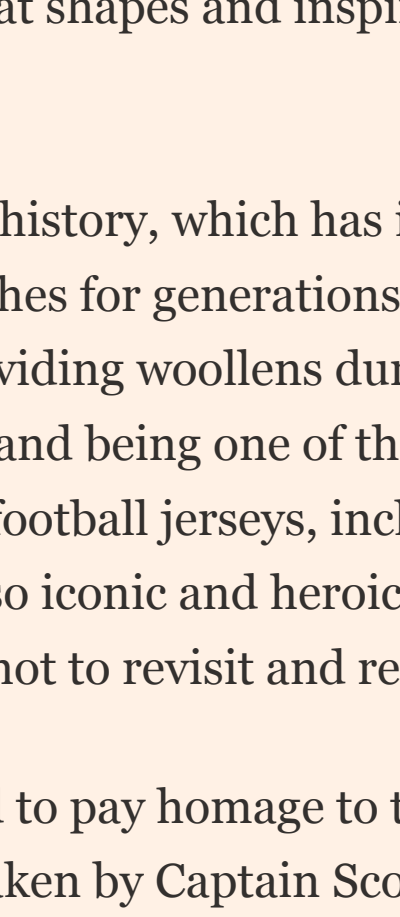
Madonna's film *W.E.*, about Wallis Simpson and King Edward VIII, may have received mixed reviews when it premiered at the Venice Film Festival (and that's putting it nicely), but in one area, at least, it has been embraced by critics.

The buzzword in men's wear circles over the past few years has been "heritage", an umbrella term used to describe anything that looks vaguely classic and speaks of a bygone sartorial age; usually something in tweed, and most definitely something Edward VIII, later the Duke of Windsor, would have worn.

The duke is credited with making Savile Row the international byword for bespoke style it is today. Indeed, this winter, many labels seem to be trying to "out heritage" each other, delving further into their archives to recreate items so authentic they could have walked straight out of the History Channel.

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Leading the way is Burberry. The brand has shown that you can use the archives to come up with something modern and of the moment but still rooted in authenticity and tradition. Companies such as Aquascutum, Belstaff, Dunhill, Pringle of Scotland and Wolsey have also been looking to their own histories in an attempt to emulate Burberry's success.



Pringle of Scotland autumn/winter 2011

Stephen Reeds, brand director of British label Wolsey, says: "Our design team have a deep affection for vintage and historical clothing; it inspires us all to be both referential and creative. Our 255-year history is what distinguishes us as an authentic heritage brand: we have a journey that is genuinely linked to the history of this country. That shapes and inspires our image now."

Part of that history, which has involved making clothes for generations of British royalty, providing woollens during both world wars and being one of the first brands to produce football jerseys, includes something so iconic and heroic it was too irresistible not to revisit and repackage.

"We wanted to pay homage to the incredible trip undertaken by Captain Scott and his dedicated team to the Antarctic as Wolsey provided almost the entire outfits for the original expedition," says Reeds of the brand's new Expedition Collection of knits, overcoats, long johns and waterproofs, which feature authentic detailing from the originals worn by Scott and his team.

"Authenticity is highly important," says Reeds. "Men respond well to classics, they know they are reliable and practical."



Captain Scott's expedition in 1912

Joshua Brown, a junior consultant in the City of London, says: "There is something honest about buying a piece of clothing that has been designed with a purpose in mind. Whether it is an original army surplus jacket or a modern reworking of a utility classic, you know the design has been tried and tested and is more than just some faddy fashion item. It is something that has stood the test of time and works."

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Nor is it just brands with an impressively long past that are brushing up on their history. Many youngish brands, such as casual wear label Denham, are writing their own story with the help of an ever-expanding archive of military clothing. Founder Jason Denham says: "Looking back to vintage for inspiration is very important. I don't think that you can truly design a new pair of jeans unless you fully understand the history, where those jeans come from, and how to make them."

As well as contemporary clothing, Denham produces a limited edition range called Recut. These are items lifted from its archive, such as "Fox Bros" reissue pea-coats or "Nautilus" parkas. "These pieces are very important for our collection as they set the tone for the theme and inspiration for the full season," says Denham.



Coats by Wolsey and Christopher Raeburn

Also partial to a little army surplus is young British designer Christopher Raeburn, who has made a name for himself with items crafted from recycled military clothing and fabrics. "I found the idea of remaking something new out of what others consider waste really appealing," says Raeburn. "Some people will just appreciate the design of my clothes but, for others, the history is definitely part of the appeal; it adds a genuine aspect to their investment. Military fabrics are particularly fascinating because they are so functional: the texture, colour and practical qualities all have background and add depth."

Belstaff, best known for its motorcycle jackets, was acquired by the Austrian based Labelux Group in May and the new owner expects its past to feature heavily in the company's future.

"Belstaff is an iconic English brand," says chief executive Harry Slatkin. "When you find a brand that has such a rich history, you pay homage to it and you don't change it. The challenge is adding modernity and making it current to today's modern world. "Brands without a history have a harder time, they have to write their own book and it's not always easily read. We all take great comfort in the past. It's something we know and understand."

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www.aquascutum.com

www.belstaff.net

www.burberry.com

www.christopherraeburn.co.uk

www.denhamthejeanmaker.com

www.dunhill.com

www.pringleofscotland.com

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