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# Urban cool, jungle-style

The safari jacket is back, blending country savvy with city flair



David Hayes JULY 13 2012



From left: spring/summer 2012 designs by Canali, Yves Saint Laurent, Bottega Veneta

It’s that time of year when negotiating the humid city streets and subways can make any urban warrior feel like Humphrey Bogart in *The African Queen* (1951), so it’s a good thing menswear designers have seen fit to reinvent the safari jacket.

From Dolce & Gabbana’s luxurious punched suedes to Bottega Veneta’s washed nappa leather styles, Canali’s elegantly tailored Indian-inspired reworkings, Yves Saint Laurent’s look back and Valentino’s leather-trimmed “couture” military twill cottons, the original multi-pocketed “country field sports jacket” is still the perfect hybrid of smart tailoring and easy, thrown-on practicality.

“For our men’s range we always want to create the perfect wardrobe where iconic and traditional items are reinvented,” says Valentino’s Pierpaolo Piccioli, who, with co-designer Maria Grazia Chiuri, put the safari at the heart of its summer men’s collection (albeit for £1,250). “This season we interpreted the safari jacket’s volume and cut in a couture way, transforming it with fabrics such as thermo-sealed nylon overlaid with camouflage patchwork. The safari aspect also inspired the colour palette of army tones such as tan and khaki, giving the collection a contemporary, urban attitude.”

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Stefano Canali, brand manager and part of the third generation at the helm of Italian luxury brand Canali, emphasises the “nostalgic appeal” of the safari jacket, “with origins in British and American tourists travelling to Africa and the Indian subcontinent to embark upon expeditions. Adopted by inspirational figures from Ernest Hemingway to James Bond, a safari jacket brings to mind the elegant explorer; a look that is masculine, rugged and functional yet chic and stylish at the same time.”

Toby Bateman, buying director at online retailer Mr Porter, says: “We have many versions of the beige summer safari-inspired jacket.” Offerings include Marc by Marc Jacobs’ sand-coloured military-style cotton field jacket (reduced to £130.50), Belstaff’s Oxney washed cotton jacket (now £135), Alexander McQueen’s half-lined field jacket (now £195).

“I think men like its practicality,” says Bateman. “The key with all iconic menswear pieces is that they have a function and that’s something that the safari jacket has in spades. It is great in changeable weather and has enough pockets to store wallet, keys, sunglasses, everything. And, as with all staples, it’s good to invest in one that will work season after season. The simplicity of the design and clean silhouette works on most men’s frames and, generally, safari styles come in a neutral palette that works with most men’s wardrobes.”

The irony is that a jacket originally intended for field use has become such a city staple – though that’s not to say it is never used for its original purpose. “Though safari wear has become a bit of a street-wear phenomenon recently, we have a very strong demand for authentic safari clothing,” says Niels van Rooyen, creative director at Holland & Holland. “Our main customers are Americans, Russians and eastern Europeans who enjoy game hunting. They stop over at Holland & Holland to buy what they need from us, right down to the binoculars and multifunctional belts to attach bullet pouches.”

For the rest of the male consumer world, however, as Bateman admits, “Going on a safari is probably the last thing on our customer’s minds.” Those who don’t do, wear.

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