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# Top of the fops

The preppy look is making way for menswear with a bohemian twist

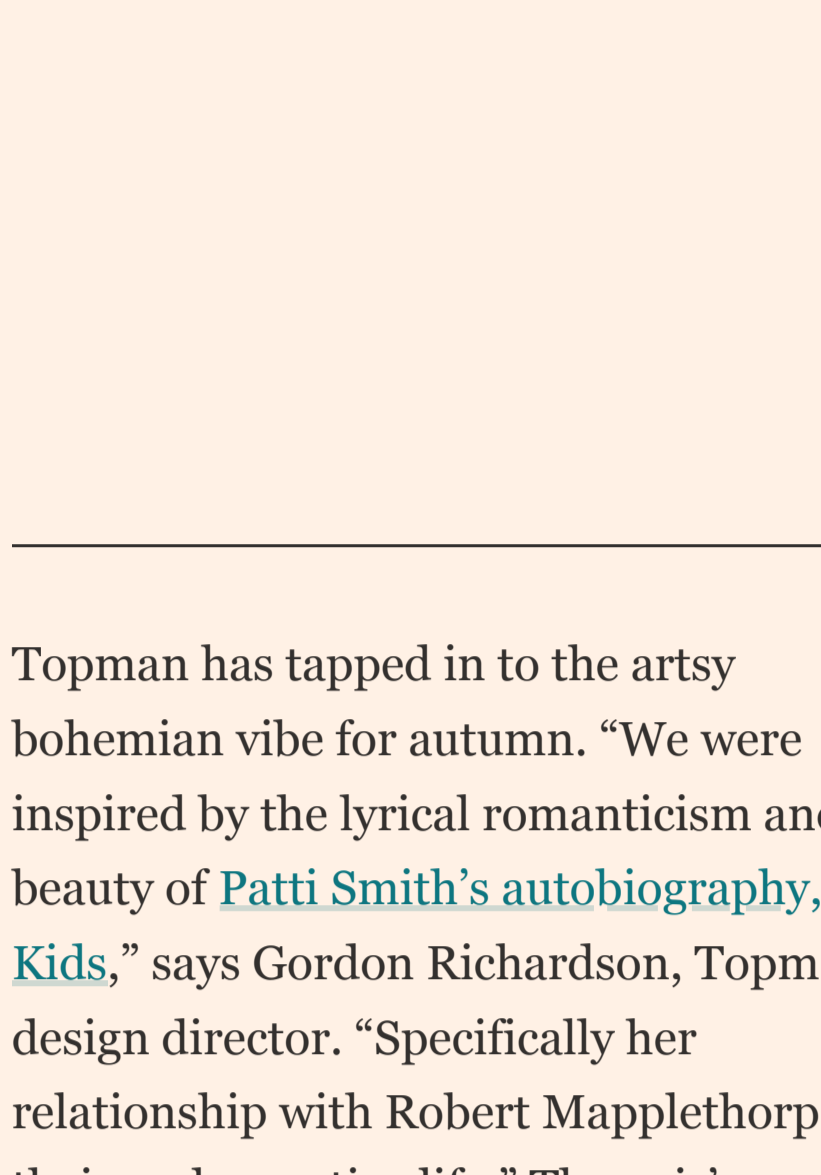


The finale of the Dolce & Gabbana autumn/winter 2012 collection © Catwalking

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David Hayes SEPTEMBER 28 2012

When Prada sent out a line-up of Hollywood A-listers – Gary Oldman, Adrien Brody, Willem Dafoe and Jamie Bell – dressed in frock coats and crisp white cravats like foppish artists from the turn of the 19th century, the message from the brand’s autumn show seemed to be: preppy is out, poetic is in.



Adrien Brody at Prada’s autumn show

The mood continued at Gucci, where fur-collared overcoats were thrown over rich tailoring, and with velvet suits at Burberry Prorsum. Dolce & Gabbana’s finale, always a barometer of the current mood, was made up of a band of foppishly bow-tied and dark suited young men that could have stepped straight from one of the portraits at the [pre-Raphaelite exhibition at Tate Britain](#).

The preppy look has held a conservative sway over men’s wardrobes for the past few years but it’s starting to look a little outdated. As autumn draws in, many designers have swapped pastel-hued chinos, button-down shirts and golf club blazers for something darker and richer, with more bohemian swagger.

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Topman has tapped in to the artsy bohemian vibe for autumn. “We were inspired by the lyrical romanticism and beauty of [Patti Smith’s autobiography, Just Kids](#),” says Gordon Richardson, Topman’s design director. “Specifically her relationship with Robert Mapplethorpe and their early creative life.” The pair’s unusual wardrobes evolved into dark, brooding looks in rich black tailoring and shearling collar coats.

Patrick Grant, creative director of E Tautz, is blunt about the death of “prep”, echoing the sentiments of social media sites that have recently been poking fun at chino-wearing urbanites. “The preppy thing looks tired and has become almost fancy dress,” says Grant. “The men’s shows in Italy have become a parade ground of idiotic über-preppiness taken to ridiculous extremes. There’s a definite move back towards celebrating a simpler style of dress with focus on strong pieces, strong fabrics, not layers of jumble.”

But how best to embrace the emerging new look without it becoming too “costume drama”? Richardson says: “Slowly introduce a darker feel into your wardrobe with some key pieces. If, like me, your summer uniform has been based on coloured chinos, then a black trouser is a good foundation on which to build this new look. It will automatically make you re-assess your wardrobe from the shoes upwards. Other key items are a double-breasted dark coat – perhaps with the added opulence of a shearling collar – a textured wool suit or the simple addition of a richly coloured scarf such as a paisley pattern or William Morris-style print that will comfortably nudge you into this trend.”

Jeremy Langmead, editor in chief at online retailer Mr Porter, says: “A lot of the more foppish looks can be eminently wearable. Many of the designers who used velvet this season made it appear very modern, cutting suits slim. We bought looks such as Burberry Prorsum’s velvet blazers and trousers in jewel-like colours, black velvet bombers and embroidered slippers from Alexander McQueen, and velvet jackets from the likes of Lanvin and Gucci. Velvet works well dressed down: a jewel-coloured velvet blazer with a simple sweater and a pair of jeans; silk print trousers from Gucci work well teamed with sneakers or loafers and a sweatshirt; while embroidered slippers look good with a pair of faded jeans, rolled up twice at the hem. The trick is to make it look easy, modern and not too try-hard.”



Burberry Prorsum coat £3,495; Alexander McQueen slippers, £345, both Mr Porter; McQueen scarf, £280, Selfridges

Adam Kelly, menswear buying manager at Selfridges, says: “Investing in luxe accessories is especially advisable this season. Not only will they provide a sartorial update but they’ll last for years. Leather gloves are a good look. Introducing print is another means of nodding to the trend; Damir Doma has some great paisley print T-shirts, which look great under a plain blazer.”

Richardson says: “The heritage grip on menswear is slowly dissipating with several new alternative directions emerging, one being a softer new romanticism. However, the nature of men’s fashion is evolutionary rather than revolutionary, so I think this more foppish look will seep through slowly.”

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As with most trends, this more bohemian, poetic look should be approached with restraint to avoid resembling Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen or Jonathan Ross. Says Patrick Grant of E Tautz: “Dandyism has always been about precision, about perfect execution and small flourishes. Experiment with flourishes but simplify everything else.”

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