■ FINANCIAL TIMES myFT Style + Add to myFT The investment biker
Leather is suddenly ubiquitous – seen not just on the runway but also on high-profile figures
Above from left: leather designs by Hermès, Yves Saint Laurent, Balmain and Dior I fin Share Save David Hayes and Melanie Abrams OCTOBER 19 2012 Is 35 too young for a midlife crisis? Perhaps not, writes David Hayes, if rapper and would-be fashion designer Kanye West is anything to go by. West has been sporting a
lot of leather lately: not just jackets, but trousers, shirts and even a leather T-shirt. Often all at the same time. And West is not the only high-profile figure with a taste for leather. Russian president Vladimir Putin's favourite off-duty attire is a macho leather flight jacket. Even Barack Obama favours a jaunty leather bomber when hopping on and off Air Force One. Peter Marino, the architect and Louis Vuitton store designer, has made a virtue
out of top-to-toe leather dressing for decades. Though the wardrobe choices of the famous have not always won the approval of the fashion police, this season they are proving to be ahead of the trend. Leather was a
runway staple at Bottega Veneta, Jil Sander, Hermès, Lanvin and Yves Saint Laurent. But Adam Kelly, menswear buying manager at Selfridges, says it's not just for the catwalks. Advertisement
"It's always great when a relatively directional trend, seen across the shows, can be easily translated into something quite commercial," says Kelly. "Leather has been one of those trends this season, and we've bought into it heavily." But, Kelly adds: "It's about everything in
moderation. Leather trims are a perfect way to introduce the trend into your wardrobe. For the slightly older guy, it's important to team leather with tailored shapes to avoid looking try-hard." Stacey Smith, menswear buyer at Matches, says: "Leather is a real staple that forms the backbone of many men's wardrobes. There was certainly an influx of black leather this season, especially at YSL, where it felt
masculine and entirely modern." But this doesn't necessarily mean a leather jacket. Rick Owens, for example, offers a leather zip-up "hoodie" for £1,145, and YSL has leather-bound tuxes for £1,935. Expensive, yes, but then leather should be viewed as an investment.
Jeremy Langmead, editor-in-chief at online retailer Mr Porter, says: "Leather jackets work well for us every season – they are a great investment purchase and will never go out of style. Currently the leather jacket is popular in all its guises: whether a classic
leather jacket from Belstaff, a hooded one from Dolce & Gabbana or a leather varsity one from Thom Browne." Richard Evans, a 34-year-old City of London trader, says: "I bought my first leather jacket when I was in my mid-twenties. I remember it seemed ridiculously expensive at the time
but I still wear it now. And, embarrassing as it might sound, I always feel that little bit cooler when I put it on." Advertisement
Stacey Smith says: "The right leather jacket can have real longevity. Fuss-free styles are the safest bet, so stay clear of excessive zips and studs, which can quickly seem dated." And leather trousers? Topman's design director Gordon Richardson says: "I've never owned leather trousers as I've always instinctively thought I couldn't carry them
off." (though Topman does offer one style of leather trousers for £125). "They are only for the very confident." Or, some might say, the overconfident. www.ft.com/stylestockists
Ann Romney on 'The Tonight Show' When Ann Romney took to the <i>Tonight</i>
Show stage in a laser-cut leather skirt suit last month, it caused a furore, writes Melanie Abrams. "Exciting and preposterous," said New York magazine. "The boldest look we've seen her in," said the Huffington Post. Like it or not – and the jury was split – the would-be First Lady's choice shows how far leather has come.
"It was time to bring leather into the mainstream," says British designer Osman Yousefzada, whose collection includes dresses in melting cream, as well as skirts and jackets mixed with brocade.
Today's leather ranges from Yves Saint Laurent's black wool crêpe dress with leather panels (£1,755) to Tom Ford's leather trench, Burberry Brit's biker jacket (£1,095) to Balmain's eye-wateringly tight red skinny trousers (£3,325) and J Brand's leggings (£875).
Then there's Acne's shiny burgundy leather cocoon coat (£2,200) with a rubber belt and metal buckle, Riccardo Tisci's vixen-like collection for Givenchy, which includes a black leather coat with red leather lining (from €12,000) and slinky turtleneck
dresses (€8,300), and Fendi's luxe leather mixed with metallic silk. Johan Lindeberg of BLK DNM, known for its biker jackets and leather leggings, says: "The proliferation of leather reflects changing roles. Women are more independent, confident and stronger, so
they're dressing stronger, in leather. There's nothing more attractive on a woman than a leather jacket, even on a red carpet." Cue actress Kristen Stewart's appearance at last May's Met gala in a strapless Balenciaga dress with multicoloured leather panels, or
Donatella Versace's strapless leather bustier dresses and flared coats encrusted with Swarovski crystals and laser-cut Byzantine crosses (€4,800), or Todd Lynn's black leather dress pieced together with ribbon (£2,150). PR executive Ashleigh Heasp sums up the skin's appeal: "Whenever I wear leather I feel smart and powerful – more so than with any other fabric."
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