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Puffa the magic jacket

This padded staple is back, and not just on the slopes

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David Hayes NOVEMBER 9 2012

Pity the poor weather reporter, bravely suffering the elements in ungainly raingear. As hurricane Sandy battered the east coast of America it was impossible to forget that “seasonal” weather is no longer that straightforward. Extreme climatic conditions call for extreme sartorial solutions: step forward the padded down jacket. What used to count as technical sportswear, reserved for the ski slope and countries bordering the Arctic Circle, has become a style essential.

“We have over 30 brands with padded outerwear this autumn; it is clearly a major fashion statement,” says Tom Kalenderian, general merchandise manager and executive vice-president of menswear at Barneys New York, where puffa-makers include Burberry Prorsum, Lanvin, Rick Owens, Maison Martin Margiela and Louis Vuitton. “The majority of the coats we carry are truly technical coats that function as well on the slopes as on the streets of New York.”

“Lots of younger guys in the office wear North Face and Canada Goose coats over their suits to work,” says Joshua Brown, 34, a consultant in the City of London. “A classic wool coat can look too dressy sometimes, especially if you commute from outside London. It’s much cooler to mix it up with something more casual like a padded jacket and keep things really smart underneath for when you get to the office. Also, if you are setting off to work at 6am in winter you really do need to dress for Arctic conditions.”

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It’s not just weather driving the trend: throw in the increasingly blurred lines between weekend wear and working-week smart, not to mention the recession-linked desire to tone down the bling and up the sartorial democracy, and the result is the perfect storm of a puffa jacket comeback. The duvet-like coats have not been this big since British label Puffa was created by Penny Rogers in 1973, and quickly became the jacket to covet. Royalty – including a young Princess Diana – and sporty types alike bought the lightweight but toasty-warm styles. (Men’s original Puffa jackets, £80, and gilets, £55, can still be found at Asos.com.)

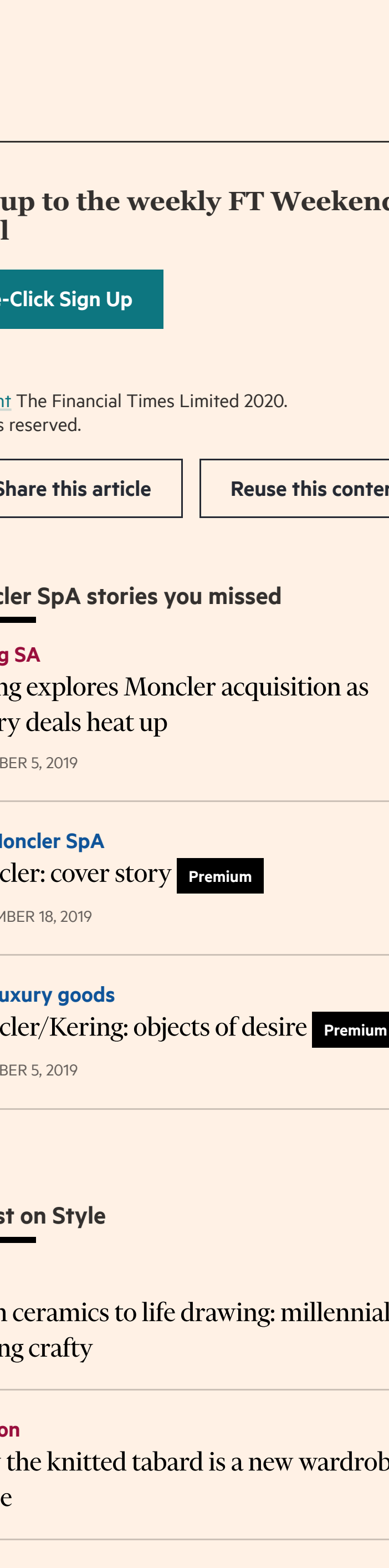


Moncler jacket

Since then, however, “Moncler moved the quilted down jacket off the slopes and on to the runway,” says Kalenderian, who has stocked the Italian Alpine specialist since 2001. In ensuing years the label “has continued to grow and become one of our top men’s brands,” with its slope-ready hooded jacket (about £1,000) already a classic.

Transforming puffas into fashion by mixing designer panache with the technical, Moncler works with New York designer Thom Browne, who collaborates on Moncler’s Gamme Bleu men’s line. And British designer Christopher Raeburn launched his collaborative line – Moncler R – this winter, with zigzag quilt jackets and parkas (priced from £1,245). (Giambattista Valli works with Moncler on Gamme Rouge, the women’s line.)

“Moncler had seen my work and was interested by the crossover between military functionality and wearable urban clothing,” says Raeburn, who is also known for his upcycling. As a result, PrimaLoft, “a lightweight and thermally efficient eco-filling produced from post-consumer waste”, was used in his Moncler pieces, which took as their starting point “a German military sleeping bag”.



Uniqlo jacket

Not surprisingly, the high street has jumped on the trend, especially Japanese retailer Uniqlo, which has been championing the ski-jacket-as-urbanwear look for the past few years. “Uniqlo’s Premium Ultra Light Down jackets were launched in 2009,” says Rachel Haworth, the company’s UK spokesperson. The quilted jackets are priced from £59.90. “For the last two winter seasons they have been bestsellers and we have sold 11m Ultra Light Down jackets worldwide.” There are 58 colours and patterns for men – more than double last season.

“The appeal is pure versatility,” says Haworth. “They essentially can be worn three seasons out of four.”

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Finance manager John Hartnett, who just bought a down-filled leather jacket from Schott, says: “I know that I can face whatever the weather throws at me, which will probably be everything and anything from now to next April,” he says. Blow us away.

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