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Orient expression

Designers are mixing and mashing with Asian styles



From left: 2013 spring/summer designs by Emilio Pucci; Haider Ackermann; Prada; Marni; Lanvin

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What?

Light the fuse and stand well back: a Chinese New Year's firecracker of **oriental-inspired fashion** has exploded on to the runway and into stores this season. From gilded dragon embroideries to obi-style sash belts, silk screen florals and loose kimono cuts, designers are finding inspiration where the red flag flies. Look east, young woman.

Why?

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The Asian market has famously powered fashion through the recent recession; it was only a matter of time before designers started responding in kind, be it creatively abstracting old clichés into satin not-quite-kimono jackets, as with **Prada – which listed** on the Hong Kong stock exchange in June 2011 – or embracing kitsch, à la Jean Paul Gaultier's homage to Boy George and his full-on 1980s geisha look. Granted, it's a bit of a mishmash of cultural references and a melting pot of countries, but there's enough on offer to fit every sartorial point of view.

Where?

From haute couture to the high street, you can dip your toe in with simple pieces touched by the exotic east, such as Topshop's black chiffon blouse embroidered with colourful birds perched on blossom branches; carry a snake appliqué box clutch from Bottega Veneta; or invest in major statement pieces such as Etro's floor-length embroidered traditional cheongsam-inspired dresses or Pucci's sumptuous black evening wear emblazoned with gold dragon embroideries. "I was drawn to the graceful sensuality of the winding dragon motifs," says Pucci's Peter Dundas. "To a more functional, yet more embellished look." Not that you have to go full-on *Madame Butterfly*. Think John Woo instead: ninja-inspired black is the key colour for many looks.

Should you invest?

"We've bought into the trend for oriental-inspired fashion in different ways," says Helen David, Harrods' head of womenswear. "Lanvin showed jackets and dresses finished with obi belts that simply nodded to the oriental trend. The obi belt transforms even the most simple items into opulent evening looks." And you won't have to fight off Chinese customers for these goodies. Sarah Ruston, fashion director of Hong Kong-based retailer **Lane Crawford**, says: "Chinese people are very proud of their roots and the work that goes into traditional Chinese clothing, especially the fine embroideries, but in general Asian or eastern influences are not what the mainland Chinese customer is looking for. The look is 'too close to home' for them. If they want to go this route for an occasion, they will look for something that has an eastern influence imagined in a new or creative way as a highlight to an outfit." See, for example, Lane Crawford's selection of origami-inspired layers from Haider Ackermann. Wouldn't it be nice if every day looked like New Year's day?

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Sealed with a ...serpent



Fashion is not the only creative sector to have taken note of the rise of the east; jewellers have likewise been inspired. Little wonder, perhaps, since this year Valentine's day falls coincidentally close to the dawn of the Year of the Snake, with all its related aesthetic possibilities.

Snakes have always been a powerful emblem in jewellery. Parisian jewellers Boucheron have created a new collection, *Serpent Bohème*, which looks back to the snake necklace given by Frédéric Boucheron to his wife Gabrielle in 1888 (pictured, £12,600). Meanwhile, contemporary jeweller Ileana Makri offers a rose gold, diamond and ruby snake pendant necklace (£1,885) and Elise Dray diamond snake charm earrings (£1,950). And for men, Tateossian have a plethora of snake motif cuff links and tie pins.

www.emiliopucci.com

www.haiderackermann.be

www.prada.com

www.marni.com

www.lanvin.com

www.harrods.com

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