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## Bold and beautiful menswear

The latest menswear offerings are full of eye-popping print and colour



David Hayes MARCH 22 2013



From left: Topman Design, Burberry Prorsum and Kenzo

Eye-popping colour, graphic pattern and eclectic print – a description of *Kaffe Fassett: A Life in Colour*, the latest exhibition at London’s Fashion and Textile Museum, but one that is equally suitable for this season’s menswear collections.

The exhibition celebrates the work of the California-born textile wizard who brought his magic way with colour and design to 1960s London and never looked back. Fassett, who is no stranger to wearing his art on his own colourful sleeves, would be spoilt for choice this season if he decided that the 50-year retrospective was good enough reason to hit the town on a shopping spree.

Adam Kelly, menswear buying manager at department store Selfridges, says: “Our menswear offer is without question the brightest and boldest it’s been for several seasons – designers have really pushed the boundaries.”

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These bold, bright designs include Gucci’s orange-and-white scarf print pyjama tops (£475); Burberry’s geometric patterned macs (£1,995); Kenzo’s outsized animal spot trousers (£307); Christopher Kane’s Jackson Pollock-inspired paint splash sweatshirts (£305); and dragonfly-print tailoring from Alexander McQueen (£1,785).

“The versatility of print is one of the reasons why it’s everywhere at the moment,” says Kelly. “Not only can it be worn an infinite number of ways but, more importantly, to differing extremes.”

British designer Jonathan Saunders adds: “Men have traditionally dressed in more subtle and muted tones, so adding an element of print to an outfit makes a great statement.”

This season Saunders has applied his bold prints to everything from classic trench coats (£1,150) to cardigans (£635) and shirts (£255).

“Print is really driving our sales, particularly with Givenchy, where we can sell out of key prints even before the item hits the shop floor if there is a waiting list,” says Darren Skey, head of menswear for British department store Harvey Nichols, where a print hoodie from the French label costs £595. “It’s a good way for someone to really shout about what they are wearing. A key print piece from Givenchy is the male equivalent of buying a statement designer handbag for a woman. But it can be a tough look to pull off. With print, less is definitely more.”

Others are more emphatic. “I’ve always had a problem with print,” says Simon Clarke, a 41-year-old City analyst. “I just think of those fancy waistcoats men used to wear at weddings or, worse, the awful Hawaiian shirts that Tom Selleck sported as Magnum. No amount of irony can make that seem cool.”

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But maybe – just maybe – there are male consumers who disagree. “It has been a slow build from last season’s coloured chinos to full-on pattern but I feel that men are becoming more and more confident,” says Gordon Richardson, design director at Topman.

The high street store has certainly embraced the trend this summer. “For our Topman Design collection this season we wanted prints with a hand-drawn aesthetic,” says Richardson. “That means everything from animal spots to outsized florals and army camouflage – the more expressive and bold the print, the better.”

But Italian designer Kean Etro warns that these designs are not for the faint-hearted: “Wearing print is a sign of courage, a sign of a man who is not afraid of living.” But what if you are just a little afraid? “Focus on one piece of print at a time,” he says.

If you do feel up to the challenge, the easiest way to buy into the trend is with a print shirt. Wait until the weather warms up and pair it with jeans; just stay away from any kind of outdoor entertaining. “As long as you avoid the ‘barbecue’ shirt,” says Topman’s Richardson, “your credibility will remain intact.”

*‘Kaffe Fassett: A Life in Colour’ runs until June 29, [www.ftmlondon.org](http://www.ftmlondon.org)*

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