

# porter asks



'60s  
Jane Birkin in a minidress in 1966; Alexa Chung, pictured here in 2013, often revisits the ingénue style

## Have you found your style decade?

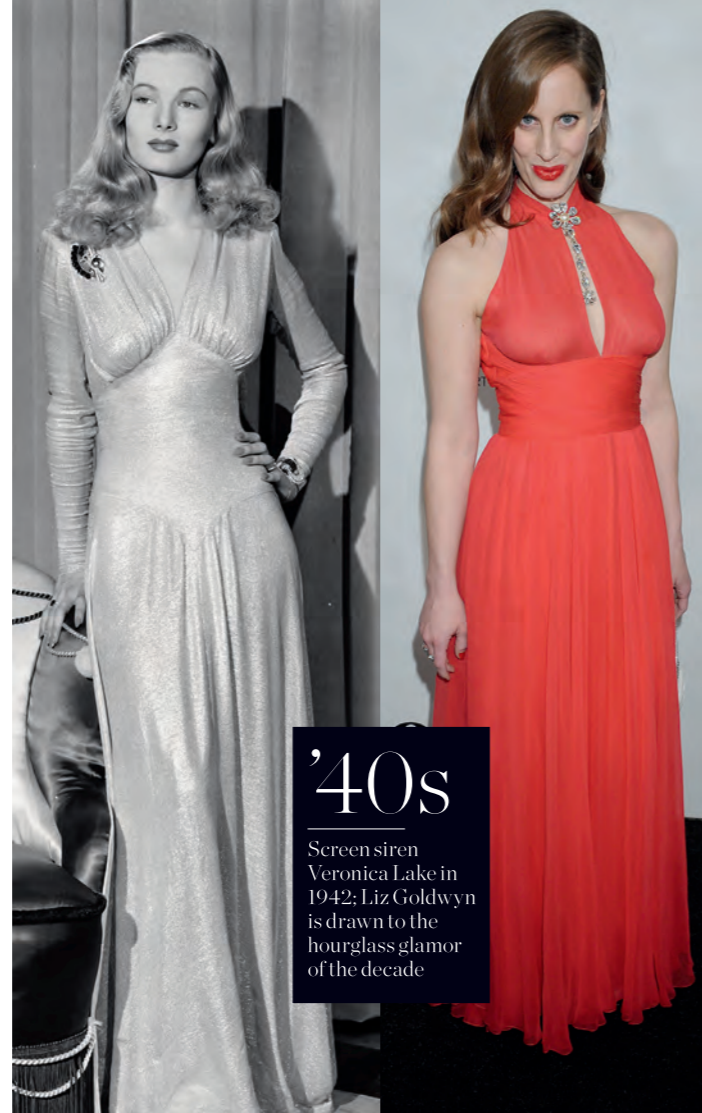
Alexa Chung adores the '60s, Sofia Coppola is a '90s girl – discovering an era that inspires you is now the most modern way to live, argues *Harriet Quick*:

*When I started attending fashion shows back in the day (circa 1995), the speed at which trends turned over was like a steam locomotive compared to today's bullet train ride. It was then I began veering towards plain-speak minimalism, and this stylistic meme, coined by Helmut Lang and Jil Sander in the '90s, has stuck with me ever since. Much as I admire the tenacity and energy of some women who manage to flip from hyper femininity to androgyny; from logo mania to norm-core; from chalky pastels to acidic brights (at the fashion shows, that can be in the course of one week), embracing the look of one era has its advantages. Call it decade dressing if you will, it lets you subtly change with the seasons, to make one's own edit, maintaining a signature that's indisputably personal. >*

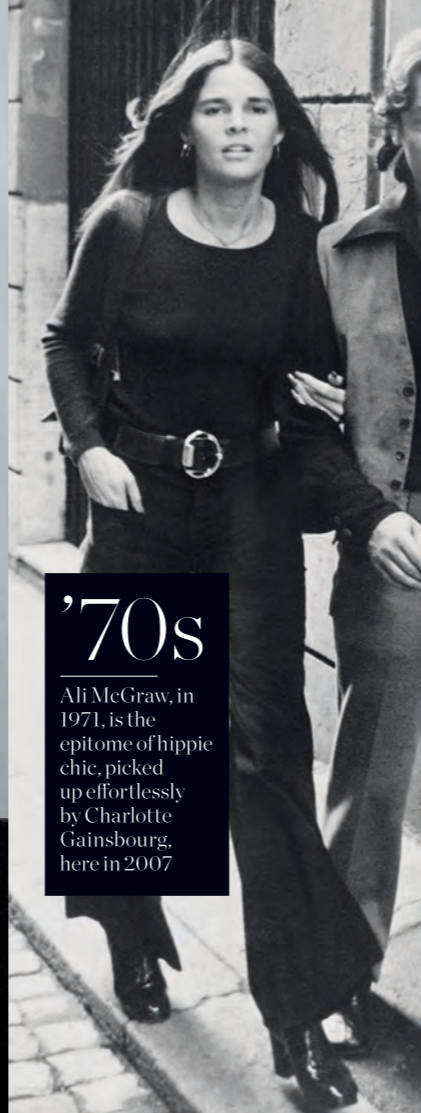
Far from being simply nostalgic, decade dressers succeed in re-interpreting their chosen era to appear very much of the now. They'll wear a '40s crepe tea dress with tiny covered buttons that could be vintage or could be Miu Miu; or a thigh-skimming pair of pale denim flares with a low buttoning cheese-cloth shirt that seems to hail from Brigitte Bardot's Saint-Tropez days. Decade dressers are seemingly oblivious to 'look of the day' decrees. Their closets are often built around a style movement ('60s Left Bank revolutionaries / '80s glamazons / '40s songstresses) or are pinned to icons both popular and personal. The result, however, is far from costume-like as they weave individuality into their emotive storytelling.

There are many benefits to homing in on one stylistic era. The current barrage of trends that flip so exhaustingly between extremes (have bomber jackets had their day? Is it about bleached or double-dyed indigo denim?) can induce a trend fatigue, or, in the words of psychoanalyst Barry Schwartz's book *The Paradox of Choice*: too many options can lead, not to liberation, but to dissatisfaction. Decade dressers have effectively liberated themselves from choice conundrums by choosing a stylistic curve that speaks of romance, escapism and individuality. Decade dressing champions of our day include Alexa Chung for her predilection for late '60s It girl style. Whether it be Christopher Kane's A-line cocktail dresses, hot new designer Vilshenko's tiers of polka dots (sporting at Poppy Delevingne's wedding) or her daytime uniform of good girl mini-kilts, brogues and navy sweaters, all of which lend her an innocent charm.

Russian couturier Ulyana Sergeenko's design signature is '50s glamor: ball gown skirts and Grace Kelly headscarves. The '90s flag-wavers include Sofia Coppola for her enduring love of white shirts, boyish denims, Alaïa skater skirts and her treasured Marc Jacobs man's parka; and fashion editor of French *Vanity Fair* Virginie Mouzat, who has always leaned towards masculine tailoring, monochrome and asymmetry from designers Martin Margiela and Céline. And many have fallen under the spell of the '70s, which brought us revolutionary fervor, war, female liberation, hippie culture, disco and flares. Kate Moss, Charlotte Gainsbourg, designers Michael Kors, Peter Dundas at Pucci and Nicolas Ghesquière, all hold the era close to their hearts. Decade dressers tend to be drawn to



'40s  
Screen siren Veronica Lake in 1942; Liz Goldwyn is drawn to the hourglass glamor of the decade



'70s  
Ali McGraw, in 1971, is the epitome of hippie chic, picked up effortlessly by Charlotte Gainsbourg, here in 2007



'90s  
Wimona Ryder, in 1991, in white T-shirt and faded denim, a look adopted and updated by Sofia Coppola



“Decade dressers have liberated themselves... by choosing a stylistic curve that speaks of romance, escapism and individuality”

the wider aspects of their chosen period – the films, the music, the icons, the colors and sometimes even the dishes; crêpe Suzette, roasted quail and ice-cream sundaes all evoke times past.

Spearheading the '80s, one might pluck out the singer Neneh Cherry, whose recent musical comeback is accompanied by her own re-interpretation of the ebullient style of that decade. Or Alice Dellal with her cut-

offs, fishnets and work boots channeled from the bad-girl radicals of London's Mud and New York's Tunnel clubs. While fashion might swing into purism or out to Doris Day hyper happy styles, these decade dressers keep building their own personal repertoire, returning to it like one would to a cherished book or soundtrack.

But why do certain eras chime with different women? The decade you fall in love with is often that of your first fashion awakening. Shoe designer Charlotte Olympia Dellal says her retro, Vargas girl, pin-up image was incubated watching movies with her Brazilian model mother, Andrea Dellal. “At an early age, I used to watch all the great old movies with her – *Gone With the Wind*, *The Red Shoes* – so that era has remained with me. I've always loved glamor,” she says. Her ‘uniform’ consists of high-waisted trousers, '40s style jackets with nipped waists and pronounced shoulders and curvy shift dresses that she wears with matching cardigans. She has a penchant for leopard skin, fishnets, sweetheart necklines, ‘set’ hair and veiled hats. And whether fashion is in a minimalist

or deconstructed mode, she sticks to her version of mid-century glamor.

The era is also a magnet for American filmmaker, artist and writer Liz Goldwyn, who is drawn to “the hourglass silhouette – a nipped-in waist never hurts – a full skirt or a tight pencil skirt with a cardigan.” Goldwyn cites Fellini, heroines Bettie Page and model Suzy Parker as pin-ups. “I admire women for their attitude, talent, brains; style is nothing without having something going on inside. For me all these women reflect independent spirit and joie de vivre.”

The way that one arrives at one's decade can be a romantic journey. For designer and creative director Lady Amanda Harlech, who has long been drawn to the 19th century, it was via her ancestors. “The 19th century is a route to ghosts of the past – my great aunt Helen and her life in Buenos Aires, the clothes that I found in the dressing-up box when I was a child,” she says. “So the sweep of a 19th-century skirt, mourning jewelry, the stricture of underpinnings and the grace of holding yourself as a woman and finding your own voice fascinates me.” Harlech brings that

“Fashion never happens in isolation... Threads crisscross back through centuries, across cultures, via pop history and politics”

fascination to her jewelry line of amulets and locket, Harlot & Bones, designed in collaboration with Dominic Jones.

Beyond the emotional pull of an era, some decades lend themselves to certain body shapes. Hourglass figures are a shoo-in for '40s styles; '50s fit-and-flare dresses lend themselves to classic pear shapes and '60s minidresses look great on the slim and long-limbed.

For reasons, not of our own making, sometimes a decade is thrust upon us. I yearn to wear those high-necked, '70s-tinged Valentino dresses, but my swimmer's shoulders and short height dictate otherwise. The mid-'90s became my decade of choice because it was a formative time for myself as well as my wardrobe. Working as editor of *Frank* magazine (from an office in an industrial block, at an Alvar Aalto desk) and for the first time buying designer clothes, I was militant in my avoidance of decoration for decoration's sake. Prada's nylon backpack was the epitome of genius; stylist Melanie Ward's work with photographer David Sims (they made the ordinary gesture, the off moment, a white shirt a pair of love-worn jeans, extraordinary) was endlessly fascinating in its repudiation of hackneyed glamor. And I was as excited back then by Helmut Lang's strategically slashed white T-shirts as I am now by a beautifully-cut white dinner shirt by Charvet or an Altuzarra pencil skirt.

Decade dressing also means having the patience to find equivalents or variations. It's about knowing the 'genus' of an era and honing in on a designer's handwriting. Fashion never happens in isolation, but constantly refers back and forth between decades and styles. Threads crisscross back through centuries, across cultures, via pop history and politics.

The collections for fall are full of decade-style influences. At Saint Laurent, Hedi Slimane continues to delve into that rich late '60s, early '70s mine with his leather car coats, glitter boots and A-line minidresses. Balmain's Olivier Rousteing's passion for the '80s has fueled seasons of collections and gathered swathes of customers in his wake. At Louis Vuitton, Nicolas Ghesquière is zipping between '60s futurism and '70s cool with crocodile coats and zipper trouser suits, while master decade mixer Marc Jacobs riffed on '60s psychedelia, with his lustrous patterned knit tunics and flares.

We entered this decade with a blinding barrage of trends that zigged and zagged between items, colors, prints and hem lengths to reach the point of obliteration. It's a relief that decade dressing is emerging as an alternative force. What's your era? It's the ideal time to go on a journey of discovery. Like Virginia Woolf's Orlando, travel through the centuries and hover over those moments, those images of elegance, beauty and provocation. Yet that moment, in precious kismet, is more than likely to choose you. ■