



GLOBAL FASHION

The worldwide fashion industry is estimated to be worth US\$1.3 trillion: around 2 percent of the global economy. And it's growing on the back of globalisation. As the fashion industry accesses diverse cultures, an eclectic fashion lifestyle is evolving

A LANKY BRUNETTE STRUTS INTO THE AIRPORT ARRIVALS

hall. Impeccably made up, she wears a diaphanous dress incorporating distinctly Japanese fabrics. A chunky gold pendant stretches across the base of her throat, emulating the tendrils of a Banyan tree, which is sacred in Indian culture. She clutches a soft leather handbag crafted with an ancient Mayan weaving technique. As she collects her Gucci Italian leather suitcase and departs, she flashes the classic red soles of her Christian Louboutin stilettos direct from Paris.

The undeniable effect that travel has had on fashion is spawning a new generation of fashion designers, whose cross-continental lives and outlooks are changing the face of fashion. Increasingly, improving travel and communications connections are directly impacting fashion by making the techniques, heritage and materials of other cultures more accessible than ever. The result is design that transcends culture, and the emergence of world fashion brands.

It is not only fashion that has become globalised: so too have the designers. One of the latest young designers personifying this trend is Bowie Wong, who was born in Hong Kong, studied in Japan and Canada, and set up his fashion brand in Australia. An intrepid traveller, Wong spends up to 200 days a year on the road, often finding inspiration through the destinations he visits.

“In terms of locations, every year I put a couple of pin points on the map for places I know will enhance my creative mind,” he begins. “For instance, last year I visited Argentina, Brazil, Cambodia, Vietnam, The Netherlands and Germany.” Of course, this is in addition to spending time in the big fashion centres of New York, London, Tokyo and Paris.

The Asian influence present in Bowie’s work can be seen in his Paper Crane collection, which incorporates origami folds into spectacular wearable couture creations. The highlight is a pair of vintage bridal kimono dresses depicting hand-embroidered cranes in flight; traditionally Japanese, yet inexorably contemporary.

French fashion designer Sonia Rykiel shows the same diverse cultural heritage and love of travel in her collections. Rykiel was born in Paris to a Russian mother and a Romanian father. Her snug-fitting Poor Boy sweaters, with ribbing on both the body and sleeves, proved that knitwear could stay on trend. The sweaters made the cover of *Elle*, pushing Rykiel into the limelight in America, where she was crowned “Queen of Knits” in 1967. Rykiel cites a road trip in the US as her most inspiring travel experience.

Designers such as Issey Miyake from Japan and Ritu Kumar from India have retained a strong cultural flair in their work, but many designers borrow heavily from cultures other than their own. In the past year alone, Vera Wang, Marchesa, Jean Paul Gaultier, Etro and Chanel have all showcased Indian-inspired collections. Asian prints and checks were all over the runways earlier in the year, represented in the works of Emilio Pucci, Etro and Prada. The reconstructed kimono reappeared in collections by Prada, Gareth Pugh and Haider Ackermann.

Ghanaian-American designer Mimi Plange is also heavily influenced by travel and world cultures. Her designs are an imaginative fusion of Victorian Europe and pre-colonial Africa with contemporary American sportswear. Somehow it works – Michelle Obama is a fan. Plange names Bath, England, as a primary source of inspiration, partly due to the history of the city, but also because of the city’s excellent Fashion Museum.

Whether for adventure or relaxation, returning home or taking in destinations rich in history, travel continues to leave its unmistakable mark on the fashion industry. “Fully embrace every destination you visit,” says Bowie Wong, “whether they be good or bad experiences. To be a true traveller, you need to go with an open mind and an open heart.” The same can be said of a true fashion designer. 🌍

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