

By Grace Cain

The vibrant maximalist clothing brand by *JJ Martin*, La DoubleJ, is about more than just fashion. It's about happiness

Double the joy

“People should never be precious about the things they collect. I wear all my vintage pieces, even though some should probably be in a museum,” says JJ Martin, founder of the charmingly maximalist lifestyle brand La DoubleJ. The Milan-based fashion journalist and designer lives by the principle that nothing should be saved ‘for best’ – whether that means serving breakfast on your favourite dessert plate (Martin uses her parents’ 1960s wedding china on a daily basis) or donning a 1970s Valentino gown for a night on the sofa.

This belief in the power of certain objects to inspire joy underpins Martin’s attitude towards the vast collection of vintage clothes and jewellery she has amassed over the past 20 years. Originally from Los Angeles, Martin describes her family as “classic outdoorsy beach-volleyball Californians”. Fashion – let alone vintage fashion – didn’t appear on her radar until the late 1990s, when she moved to New York and took a job in the marketing department of Calvin Klein. More importantly, she discovered the city’s iconic Chelsea Flea. “I didn’t have a whole lot of money at the time, so it felt like I’d discovered a magical paradise,” she laughs. “For \$40, you could go home with an amazing evening gown.” It was here that Martin bought her first ever piece of vintage clothing. “It was a beautiful 1960s faux-fur coat, with a big fox collar and a nipped-in waist. After that, I was addicted.”

When Martin eventually moved to Italy’s fashion capital in 2001, it was for the love of a man rather than a love for fashion – although the chance to explore a fresh vintage scene was definitely a perk. “I raided every *mercato*,” she remembers. “I loved church charity shops, and I still do. There are so many wonderful treasures to be found in the things that people discard.”

But Martin is the first to point out that the sight of an enthusiastic young American rummaging around in a discount bin wasn’t exactly common in

the markets of Milan. “At that time, there wasn’t the same culture around vintage clothes that we see today. I think people had a perception of it as being something really uncool and dirty,” she remembers. “I felt like a fish out of water. The classic Milanese women would all stare at me as I walked down the street in my weird clothes.” Martin was, however, poised at the cusp of a vintage explosion in her chosen city. And by the time she launched La DoubleJ as an e-commerce site in 2015, she was leading the charge against the common misconception of second-hand fashion.

Originally a “shoppable magazine”, Martin’s platform allowed her to sell pieces from her own clothing collection while celebrating the stories of Milan’s most creative women (who, it would seem, had slowly begun to come around to her way of thinking about vintage fashion). But the success of La DoubleJ led to an inevitable problem: Martin had spent years curating her collection, but now she was struggling to source enough pieces to keep up with the demands of her customers.

“Finding great vintage can be difficult,” she explains. “There’s a lot to consider, from the condition and the quality to the sizing and the price. Even when you do find a perfect dress, it’s a one-off. We started to wonder if we could create new clothes with the same flavour.” Drawing on the archives of some of Italy’s top textile manufacturers, La DoubleJ began using vintage prints and patterns to produce new designs. What began as a modest offering – a single dress in eight different prints – has since grown into a full lifestyle brand that celebrates all things maximalist.

“I’m very sensitive to the energy of colours, and I think that’s why I am so drawn to prints and bright shades,” she explains. (For the self-confessed spiritualist, the concept of ‘good energy’ comes up a great deal.) “I call it ‘raise your vibration’ fashion – clothes designed to lift your mood.” >



JJ Martin, founder and creative director of La DoubleJ, at home in Milan. The wallpaper is a 1940s design by Stig Lindberg, while the oil paintings are by Martin’s great-grandmother



“Don’t wait for a reason to put on a favourite outfit. Even if you’re just at home with your dog, wear that *special dress*”

In the past, Martin’s own collection of joy-boosting vintage resided in a dedicated basement. However, a recent move to a new apartment encouraged her to streamline her collection, and she now keeps only her most special finds. “My favourite era is the 1970s, and my most treasured pieces are those by my favourite designers of that time: Valentino, Oscar de la Renta and Yves Saint Laurent,” she says. “They all used bright colours and print, but in a very glamorous way. I have one particular de la Renta gown that I just adore – a real party dress in purple, coral and white embroidered organza.”

Martin now keeps her clothes in a plain white flatpack wardrobe that allows its colourful contents to take centre stage. However, even the queen of print occasionally needs a break. “My closet is a storm of pattern,” she chuckles. “So, at either side, I have velvet drapes in a rich petrol blue – the same shade as the walls in my meditation room. If I ever feel overwhelmed, I can just close them and feel as though I’m in a sanctuary.”

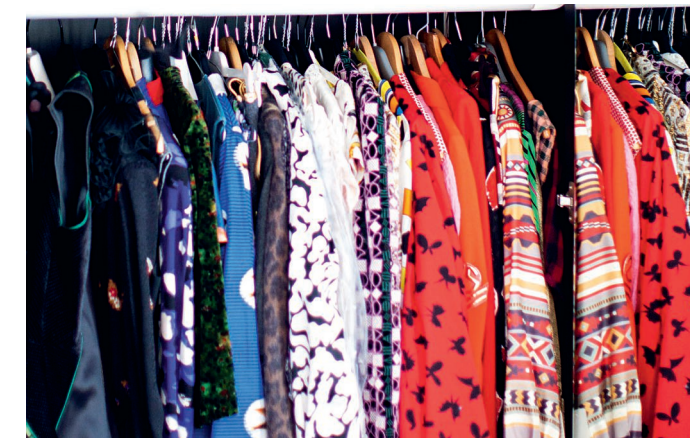
Jewellery, however, is another matter. “A huge part of my vintage jewellery collection is hanging on the wall in my bathroom,” she says. “While I will occasionally wear certain pieces, I mostly love having them around to enjoy. What would be the point of keeping it all in a box?” Thanks to an old partnership with an “amazing woman who had a huge archive of jewellery”, Martin’s bathroom wall features a large selection of pieces by Ugo Correani, an Italian designer who has created jewellery for brands such as Versace, Christian Lacroix and Valentino. However, it’s a 1920s Chanel drop necklace that Martin cites as her favourite item in the collection. “So far,” she adds, with a smile.

It’s abundantly clear that Martin’s obsession with vintage stretches far beyond her closet (and her bathroom). Her home is full of items she has salvaged from charity shops and warehouses, ranging from bamboo dining chairs and mismatched silverware to the 1990s polyform kitchen she recycled from an elderly lady in Milan. Does she buy *anything* new? “I would never wear vintage shoes,” she says, appearing horrified at the thought. “Especially if I was wearing a vintage dress. It’s important to break the look, otherwise it’s all a bit too obvious.”

Ultimately, though, Martin’s main piece of advice for any budding collector is always the same: seek the things that give you joy, and don’t even think about hiding them away in a dusty old cupboard. “Don’t wait for a reason to put on a statement print or a favourite outfit,” she says. “Even if you’re just at home with your dog, wear that special dress. The right clothes can be the perfect mood booster.” She pauses thoughtfully. “At the end of the day, I don’t want to create fashion, I want to create joy. That’s a bigger, loftier mission, right?” □

Manteca Vinella/Photoflyer

Womenswear, First Floor; and harrods.com



COLLECTORS’ TIPS

- 01/ Never go shopping with a specific purchase in mind; you’ll never find it. Open up to spontaneity and serendipity, and allow the vintage gods to shower you!
- 02/ Never buy something that doesn’t fit properly (unless you have the most amazing tailor ever on speed dial).
- 03/ Whenever you visit a new town or city, always check out the small local markets.
- 04/ Church charity shops are always a winner-winner-chicken-dinner spot for hidden gems!
- 05/ Have patience, have fun, and be playful and youthful. Remember: this is not serious shopping.

This page, from top: JJ Martin at Milan Fashion Week in 2018; a peek at the “storm of pattern” inside her closet. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: The 1960s Emilio Pucci dress that Martin sold the year she launched La DoubleJ as an e-commerce site; the designer doesn’t take a vintage route where shoes are concerned; homewares that are also conversation starters adorn her Italian home