

POWDER SUSSEX

From slope-ready outfits to après-ski chic and the elemental heat-seeking collections in between... *Grace Cain* ascends the snow-capped heights of AW21's multifaceted skiwear

You've scaled the heights of Gorpcore (everyone's favourite lockdown-induced hiking-inspired trend); you've fired down a few aces in Tenniscore (no surprises for guessing what that involved); and now you're ready to graduate to fashion's latest sporting obsession – which we're calling *Après-Chic*. Yes, an avalanche (sorry) of ski-inspired winter shows has left us dreaming of *vin chaud* and Val d'Isère, begging the question: why has fashion's obsession with ski suddenly hit new heights?

If anyone can provide a satisfactory answer to that question, it's Miuccia Prada. Her AW21 collection for Miu Miu was a surrealist, camp love letter to mountainside pursuits through the ages; "practical fantasies", as she dubbed them. Filmed at high altitude in Cortina d'Ampezzo (an ultra-chic resort monikered 'the Queen of the Dolomites' and once favoured by the likes of Sophia Loren and Brigitte Bardot) and under cloudless blue skies, the fantastical Miu Miu Mountain Club set forth across the challenging snowy terrain. "Bravery in endeavour is reflected by courage in clothing," reads Ms Prada's statement, and there's a valid interpretation of fashion's snowy obsession that says we all just need to feel a little extra protected at the moment. But Prada's emphasis on the inherent incongruity of staging a fashion show in the snow mirrors the attitude that many of us have towards dressing up in 2021. After so many weekends spent watching Netflix, it's forgivable if your desire for glamour is tinged with a hint of nervousness, and that's the sort of contrast Miu Miu is dealing in; think padded bodysuits and leg-engulfing furry boots paired with silky slippers that feel more boudoir than black run.

The surreal juxtaposition between formal attire and the harsh remoteness of a snow-covered mountain was also embraced by Thom Browne, who employed former World Cup downhill racer Lindsey Vonn to star in a dream-like film showing his latest men's and women's collections. Drawing inspiration from film noir, the production follows Vonn as she flies down the slopes, guided by eerie friends dressed in Browne's couture-like creations: sculptural plissé dress-tuxedo hybrids inspired by the lines carved by skates on ice; and voluminous quilted overcoats that only the brave – or foolhardy – would contemplate as fit for a snowboarding adventure.

Browne's Oz-like reverie is proof that skiwear can embody the same sphere of fantasy as high fashion, even while offering an extra layer (or three) of warmth and comfort. For Chanel's Autumn/Winter 2021 collection (playfully titled *Coco Neige*), Virginie Viard chose legendary Parisian nightclub Castel as the venue to showcase her Alpine-inspired vision.

The result is the wardrobe of a world where you can leap straight from the peaks of Courchevel into the club's Serge Gainsbourg era, throwing off your puffer jacket to reveal crop top and matching ski pants beneath. Silk and sequins appear alongside Norwegian-style jumpers, quilted salopettes and moonboots – which are covered in a voluminous shearling layer that can be removed once the dance floor heats up.

Winter sports have always been part of Chanel's DNA, beginning with the regular trips that Gabrielle Chanel would take to St Moritz in the 1930s. Karl Lagerfeld's tenure was peppered with many a mountainous reference – notably in his Autumn/Winter 2021 show, which featured ski masks and snowboards – and culminated in the launch of the maison's first official ski line and a (posthumous) AW19 show that was staged among chalets erected in the Grand Palais. All of which speaks to the reassuringly timeless nature of skiwear, where your mum's salopettes wouldn't look out of place in Vail this winter.

The last major style shift in skiwear arguably happened in 1952, when Maria Bogner launched the revolutionary stretch nylon pants that ultimately changed the face of the industry, finding favour among the likes of Marilyn Monroe and Jackie Kennedy. The playful blend of fun, function and sex appeal represented by Bogner's colourful designs still impacts our outfit choices on the slopes and beyond; this season's quirky *Après-Chic* has more than a hint of the '90s/Y2K sensibility that has found acolytes everywhere from TikTok to the catwalk, conjuring visions of Princess Diana hitting the slopes in Lech. In a time of constant change, there's something soothing about that sort of nostalgia.

If, however, heading out clubbing in a ski jacket feels a bit much, this is one trend that is easy to cherry-pick. Team your high-neck Givenchy body with boots and ultra-fuzzy accessories à la Audrey Hepburn in the opening scene of *Charade*. Or hold on to just a hint of cosiness with a super-textured bag (we love the cuddle potential of the furry totes proposed by Fendi, Burberry and Prada). 'Practical fantasies', right, Ms Prada? □

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