

# Wallpaper\*

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## Forward looking

A head-turning new take on fashion, art and design

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Secrets  
of Italy's  
fashion  
elite

## Bags to riches

Loewe's leap up the luxury league

## The archivists

Why there are rich rewards in helping fashion remember

## Wonder wall

The outside story of Paul Smith's all new curiosity shop

## Undiscovered country

Insider tips on Italy's local heroes

## HOUSE BUILDING

The go-to architects for palatial stores and glittering HQs





UNUSED HORSEHIDE WORK BOOTS BY BONE DRY,  
BEAUTIFUL PATINA, CIRCA 1930s, \$1,500



CANVAS JACKET WITH NO LABEL, INTERESTING FASTENERS  
ON FRONT, BEAUTIFUL PATINA, CIRCA 1920s, \$2,000



# The searchers

In pursuit of rare gems to save or sell, professional fashion collectors hunt high and low



JC PENNEY'S PAY DAY CHINSTRAP DENIM WORK JACKET,  
HEAVILY REPAIRED WITH ALL PERIOD REPAIRS, CIRCA 1930s, \$3,500



LEVI'S BUCKLE-BACK BROWN DENIM JEANS (BROWN DENIM IS UNUSUAL  
FOR LEVI'S OF THIS ERA), EXPOSED RIVETS, CIRCA 1900s, \$5,000



CONDUCTOR'S CAP, EARLY BLUE DENIM AND STIFEL FABRIC, GREAT COLLECTOR'S PIECE DUE TO LABEL AND MATERIALS, CIRCA 1900s, \$5,000



WWI US MARINES SNIPER JACKET WITH HAND-DRAWN IMAGES (IN THIS CASE THE THEME IS 'A GIRL IN EVERY PORT'), AMAZING ARTWORK, \$12,000



HORSEHIDE LEATHER JACKET, VERY UNUSUAL DESIGN, PROBABLY ONE OF THE RAREST LEATHER JACKETS IN THE WORLD, CIRCA 1920s, \$20,000



DENIM BIB OVERALLS WITH BEAUTIFUL NATURAL WEAR AND STAIN, CIRCA 1900s, \$3,500



When LA's contemporary art museum LACMA was looking to beef up its thin historical fashion collection in 2008, it didn't dispatch its curators on a whirlwind buying trip to Europe's famous auction houses. Rather, museum director Michael Govan and his fashion and textile team dropped in on a cold, dark warehouse in Switzerland where they scooped up 550 antique European fashion pieces in one fell swoop.

The collection, which included women's, men's and children's clothing from 1700-1915, had been painstakingly researched and carefully assembled over several decades by Martin Kamer and Wolfgang Ruf. Kamer and Ruf had combed every inch of the world's possible vintage troves so that LACMA didn't have to – and the men were rewarded handsomely for their troubles. The collection was reportedly bought for more than €6m.

'If you know your frocks, it can be very good business,' says Kamer, a former costume designer who has been collecting vintage clothes for over 30 years. 'Quite often a museum doesn't have the time to go to an auction, or doesn't know what's there. So we do their job for them. We are the curators.'

Kamer and Ruf are part of a select group of professional fashion collectors who trawl through hoards of old clothes scattered across the globe, plucking out gems and amassing their finds under black-out sheets in dust-free, temperature-controlled storage units.

'I hunt for clothes every day,' says Italian collector Enrico Quinto, who keeps his 7,000 pieces of 20th-century fashion under lock and key in an obscure underground garage in Rome. 'I find things at flea markets, vintage stores, auctions, and from little old ladies who call me up wanting to sell things. But the best place to buy, if you have an eye and recognise quality, is Ebay.'

These professional collectors have the eye and know quality when they see it. They also have a better sense of an object's inherent worth than most sellers, including auction houses. 'Once I bought a 1630s men's jacket from Christie's and had sold it to the Met Museum on the phone before even getting home,' says Kamer. He has also fished out an 1880 handbag from the €5 bin at a vintage market that was worth around €500.

Kamer labels himself a 'collector dealer.' 'I deal so that I can collect,' he explains.



LARRY MCKAUGHAN AT HOME IN SEATTLE, WITH JUST SOME OF HIS VINTAGE AMERICAN WORKWEAR COLLECTION. SEE IN MORE DETAIL ON PREVIOUS PAGES, TOGETHER WITH HIS ANNOTATIONS

'Collecting is an expensive habit and the management becomes burdensome. You need a ten room mansion to store it all.'

Quinto, who also feels the weight of his merchandise, occasionally sells to a few select vintage dealers. 'But only items that are easy for me to get,' he says. In 2001, for example, he was flush in vintage Loris Azzaro gowns and sold one to Cameron Silver, the owner of LA vintage couture store Decades. Silver, in turn, sold it to Nicole Kidman, who wore it to the *Moulin Rouge* premiere in New York, igniting a new interest in the label.

Quinto's principle pursuit, however is buying clothing rather than selling it. He accumulates with a very specific goal in mind. 'I'd like to one day create a museum or make a deal with an existing Italian»





KRIZIA, 1981

museum,' he explains. In the meantime, he is organising an exhibition called 'Italian Glamour' in Rio de Janeiro this November and another with the V&A in London in 2014.

Fashion-related shows are now profitable propositions for institutions (Alexander McQueen's 'Savage Beauty' show drew over 600,000 visitors to New York's Metropolitan Museum), and collectors such as Quinto and Kamer have become a vital resource.

There are other fashion antiquarians, however, that never go near a museum. They operate with the single intention of selling to other fashion enthusiasts. Larry McKaughan specialises in pre-1930 American men's workwear. 'I have a collection, but primarily it's because we're looking for a home for the pieces we have,' McKaughan explains of the 400 items currently housed at his base in Seattle, Washington. 'I don't keep things for myself – which doesn't mean I don't love the stuff, because I do. But this is my business.'

McKaughan's speciality is extremely niche. He is one of the few in the world to deal in the likes of rare 1919 Hirsch-Weis canvas trousers, late-1800s Levi's one-back-pocket, buckle-back trousers (which he sold for \$35,000), and dead stock (a zenith category of never worn, washed or sold merchandise bearing original sales tags) from old mom and pop shops. His customers are often obsessive Japanese denim collectors who help boost sales to \$2m per year.

But there's more to the vintage business than just turning over merchandise. Armed with an exhaustive and encyclopaedic knowledge of fashion design history, as well as their personal archives of fashion designs, books, magazines and photographs, these collectors often become the go-to guys for contemporary fashion designers looking for ideas or inspiration for their new collections.



GIANNI VERSACE, 1983



COURRÈGES, 1965

ABOVE, ENRICO QUINTO AT HIS HOME IN ROME WITH A 1968 COURRÈGES DRESS AND JACKET THAT ONCE BELONGED TO FRENCH ACTRESS MYRIAM BRU. ALSO PICTURED ARE PIECES FROM QUINTO'S COLLECTION

Quinto has frequently advised Frida Giannini's design team at Gucci (he was instrumental in digging up the vintage Gucci prints she used on her first Spring 2006 collection), and worked with Roberto Cavalli for several years. Kamer has extensively assisted Ralph Lauren with its RRL collection, one of his biggest sales clients, as well as J Crew and Abercrombie & Fitch. Kamer's huge library, meanwhile, has been a draw for prestigious museums such as the Kyoto Costume Institute and LACMA.

Though most serious collectors can't resist pouncing on a perfect condition, early Coco Chanel or Paul Poiret, each has developed a historic or geographic speciality. For Quinto, co-founder of Rome's»





MARTIN KAMER AT HOME IN ZUC, SWITZERLAND. ON THE TABLE IS A SWATCH BOOK FROM 1912, FEATURING SWATCHES BY THE WIENER WERKSTÄTTE

Borghetto Flaminio vintage market, it is post-war Italian designers, including 1950s Simonetta, late-1960s Valentino couture, 1970s Lancetti and 1980s Gianni Versace. Because his collection is nearly complete, he is now obsessed with configuring 1980s separates (jacket, skirt, shirt, shoes) from Gianfranco Ferré, Krizia, Giorgio Armani and Versace into complete looks.

Following his big sale to LACMA, Kamer thought he was finished with 18th- and 19th-century European fashion. But, after recently landing a windfall of merchandise, he's currently repeating the exercise. He and Ruf have amassed another 1,000-piece collection, including two or three examples of every silhouette from each major decade. The duo are currently hunting for a buyer.

McKaughan, who also runs his own fashion label called Heller's Cafe, focuses on collecting big-ticket items in men's workwear. He recently sold a Filson piece for \$30,000. 'No one comes to me for the \$500 piece,' he says. And actually, no one comes to him that doesn't want to do business. His showroom welcomes designers or collectors by appointment, but is not open to the public.

'There's a reason people don't get this,' he says of strangers who might walk off the street and balk. "\$10,000 for a pair of jeans? Really?" I realise people are bewildered by what I do. So I enjoy it when I can share it with someone who appreciates it.'

So too do Kamer and Quinto, who like to fly under the radar. 'The big joke when I buy a dress from a store owner who doesn't know me is, "So what do you plan to do with it - wear it?"' Quinto says. 'I don't even answer. I just smile.' ★



SACK-BACK GOWN, FRANCE C1765: SILK BROCADE



STOMACHER, ENGLAND C1720: EMBROIDERED SILK

## INSIDER'S VIEW

### What's trending in the vintage market?

**Kamer:** 19th-century men's clothes, especially trousers, which were generally handed down to servants. (A man's suit dating from the 1840s recently sold for £28,000 at Christie's).

**Quinto:** Gianni Versace before his death. An early 1990s chain-mail dress typically costing €1,000 is now valued at €4,000.

### What's the rarest or most valuable piece in your collections?

**McKaughan:** I just sold a Filson piece for \$30,000, but my top seller was a pair of late-19th-century Levi's one-back-pocket trousers (\$35,000).

### Unexpectedly pricey items?

**Kamer:** 19th-century country frocks are very rare because they were reused and turned into children's clothing or rags, so there aren't many of them around.

### First important purchase?

**Kamer:** A pair of 1740s red leather shoes with high heels. I didn't know how important they were. They are now in a museum and worth £20,000.

### Where can you find the best deals?

**Quinto:** The best place to buy is Ebay.  
**Kamer:** I search everywhere, including the €5 bins.