

STYLE



PRADA

SARA BERMAN

Dresses in Berman's current collection, far left, feature prints taken from Twenties Art Deco fabrics

Miuccia Prada's inspiration for this print-skirt came from sketchy postcards from the Fifties

NICHOLSON

The "Seaweed" print that EQ Nicholson designed in the Fifties is now appearing on clothes and homewares



they work now." In addition to bringing back her "Splatter" and "Warhol" prints, she has also reintroduced the "Twig" print from the dress she wore on the cover of *Newsweek* magazine in November 1976. Two years after that, Celine launched its well-known gold-chain print. And this summer, it's back with a vengeance. "It's an important part of Celine's heritage," says the label's designer Michael Kors. "I decided to revive the pattern because it's part of the inspiration – Seventies and Eighties Monte Carlo – behind my latest collection. I've used it in an oversized proportion on both ready-to-wear and bags for a modern retro look."

Handbags nabbed themselves a seat on the vintage bandwagon early on. Stitched on the outside of Louis Vuitton's this summer are leather stamps like the ones that appeared on Vuitton luggage in 1870, and inside, the lining takes inspiration from the pinstriped canvas called "Trianon", the material first used in 1854 to line all Louis Vuitton trunks.

Over in Milan, Miuccia Prada picked up with prints where she left off last season, replacing the Art Nouveau patterns she used for autumn/winter – taken from the archives of neckwear manufacturer Holliday & Brown, which gave Miuccia access to more than 135 of its print books) – with sketchy postcard prints for spring/summer. Everything from circle skirts and pleated poplin dresses to headscarves and bags is illustrated with colourful views of Milan, Venice and Rome – or decorated with graphic prints and patterns taken from furniture archives. Prada used two ancient dyeing techniques: tie dye, which dates back 5,000 years to Mesopotamia, and shibori from Japan, which gives you a unique

design each time. For even more vintage appeal, she has used fabrics that look washed, worn and manipulated, and left hems inside out and unfinished. Miu Miu was also given a dose of yesteryear, with several skirts and narrow-cut jackets made in vintage "cloquet" – an embossed evening fabric found in Prada's archives from the Fifties and made from a weaving technique that is no longer used.

According to designer Sara Berman, who regularly trawls through Liberty's print archives for ideas, people are beginning to warm to patterns of a bygone era. "People like something with a bit of history, something that has a story behind it," says Berman. This season, she recreated a Twenties Art Deco print of a lady on a black background, a Sixties secretaries print and a daisy print on muslin – adding another vintage dimension. "The muslin reminds me of something that has been stored away in the attic for years, then when you wear it, it softens again," she says. "It's a comfortable association."

For more than 20 years, Tim Nicholson, the youngest son of print designer, artist and decorator EQ Nicholson of the famously

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artistic Nicholson family, has been cataloguing his mother's lino-printed fabrics from the Thirties, Forties and Fifties. Thanks to his friend Peter Hitchin, these prints – including the instantly recognisable "Seaweed" and "Black Goose" – now appear on corseted prom dresses, cropped tops and trousers designed by a Parisian designer friend of Hitchin's. The clothes will be sold under the label La Belle Dame Sans Merci. Now we can all relish a piece of the past – something perhaps EQ herself wouldn't be so happy about. "She'd probably be mildly unimpressed to see her prints used like this today," says Hitchin. "She was rather self-effacing and no-nonsense, she always underplayed her talent."

The trend has entered the home now, too – Wallpaper company Cole & Son has started reproducing its archive prints from as far back as the Twenties; and designers enraptured by the retro vibe aren't limiting themselves to prints: Margaret Howell sells vintage furniture by Ercol, while Paul Smith sells customised furniture, including pieces by Arne Jacobsen, and accessories, such as Art Deco lamps. The past is well and truly here to stay, it seems. ■

Maisie Hill; Fototheme. Cotton dress, by Sara Berman, £145, at Harrod's and Liberty; Cotton prom dress, by La Belle Dame Sans Merci, £795, at La Belle Dame (01308 650288); Screen, £850, at James Vermer Furniture (0207 489488)