Clip Art

A treasure trove of dress clips embodies journalist Nathalie Atkinson’s penchant for the past.

By ODESSA PALOMA PARKER

HIDDEN TREASURE
After a decade of collecting, Atkinson has amassed a cache of 268 dress and fur clips that consists of pairs as well as mismatched singles. They are stored with other costume jewellery in a circa-1920s plumbing supply cabinet whose drawers are lined with velvet flocking.

RETO APPEAL
Even Atkinson’s tuxedo cat is, in a way, an homage to vintage cinema: He’s named for film legend Buster Keaton. Atkinson channelled the dashing aesthetic of silver screen stars by adding art deco-style dress clips to a dapper dinner jacket by Emerson Fry.

HISTORY LESSON
A technicolour assortment of dress clips from the 1930s, ’40s and ’50s looks right at home with Atkinson’s extensive library of historical art and fashion books.
Unlike collecting other costume jewellery, which can be quite costly, Atkinson’s devotion has so far proven to be accessible. “When it gets to $20, I hesitate,” she says. The most she has spent is around US$110 for a fur clip (a piece similar to a dress clip but with a backing made thick enough to pierce pelts) made by Hattie Carnegie, a New York-based designer in the 1940s known for her particularly recognizable sartorial designs. But that’s not to say that Atkinson wouldn’t splash out if given the right opportunity. “The holy grail for me—and it’s never going to happen—would be pieces [from] Elsa Schiaparelli,” she says. “They were made by a very young Jean Schumacher in 1938 and ’39. They’re the most garish, ugly, wonderful things. They’re very, very scarce. I’ve never seen them with a price on them—that’s how rare they are.”

For now, Atkinson is happy to scour for less lofty but no less unique design that she can add to her regular rotation. “It’s becoming more challenging, and that’s kind of what I want: for the collecting to be something more than just going on eBay and buying everything,” she says. Her dress clip collection presently includes stately art deco-style ones, “mid-to late-’30s Victorian throwback” and kitschy Bakelite pieces and some featuring colourful “Jelly Belly” Lucite elements. It also includes figural pieces ranging from floral arrangements to delicate hands (complete with manucures)—playful representations of just how creative dress clip designers could be.

The extensive mixture of aesthetics and details in Atkinson’s collection means that she essentially has a dress clip for every occasion—and she wears them in all manner of ways. “Because the clips are archaic, people have to find new uses for them, whether it’s wearing a single dress clip that has been separated from its twin or [wearing one] on a hat,” she says. “I sometimes wear them with a ribbon around my neck.”

Atkinson also says that in addition to being ideal accessories—“they can stretch” one’s wardrobe, taking a look from day to evening”—dress clips, thanks to their versatility, can be as much of an eye-catching delight for the wearer as the viewer. “I wear a lot of toppers and jackers, and lapels are my favourite thing to wear them on simply because they’re a finishing touch,” she says. “I tend not to wear a lot of earrings, and I went through a phase where I wore a lot of vintage necklaces. But I’ve switched to bracelets and dress clips because I like looking at them. A necklace is for somebody else to look at—same with earrings. With dress clips, I can look down and see them and enjoy them.”
Sequins are great to wear for breakfast, lunch and dinner,” announces Mickey Boardman while sitting cross-legged in his Lower Manhattan apartment. It’s a cozy boîte that explodes with colour and kitch from every available space, thanks to his predilection for anything rainbow-hued and charmingly retro.

As the editorial director of Paper magazine, where he interned in the early 1990s while still a fashion student at Parsons The New School, Boardman has been a fixture on the international style scene for over two decades. When he was younger, he was the only person he knew who had a Members Only jacket, and he splurged on a pair of Saint Laurent pants. As he acclimatized to New York’s vivacious nightlife scene, his signature style morphed into »

Mister Glitz

Loads of sparkle gives editor Mickey Boardman’s look a lift.

by ODESSA PALOMA PARKER

WILD AT HEART

Call it animal attraction—Boardman owns multiple pieces from London label Ashish, including separates in big cat and zebra prints. Here, he wears an eclectic ensemble with shoes by Junya Watanabe.

CHECK MATE

As if the checked pattern of sequins wasn’t enough embellishment, these jogging pants from Ashish’s Spring 2015 collection also boast a selection of colourful stones.

FLOWER POWER

A pair of shorts from Ashish’s Fall 2018 collection hangs amid Boardman’s overflowing collection of books (the topics of which range from art to the histories of various royal families).

MERRY MIX

In addition to owning an array of showy clothing (pictured here are a jacket by Gucci and a top by Ashish), Boardman has a selection of equally eye-catching jewellery, including an heirloom ring from his grandmother and a customized pendant necklace from New York-based brand Alexis Bittar.
a shell top or ladies’ blouse with some kind of hand-painted print” along with a chandelier necklace and pants that he hid under into clam diggers. The finishing touches were Pearl River Mart flip-flops “and a weird bag,” he says. Today, Boardman is known for ensembles that combine casual items like Lacoste polo shirts (of which he purports to own hundreds) with dazzlingly tactile pieces, primarily of the sequined variety.

It’s no surprise that Boardman, who was born in 1966, has a penchant for high-octane glamour. “I loved Bob Mackie, I loved The Carol Burnett Show and I loved Cher,” he says about the early influences on his taste for anything flashy. “I call my aesthetic ’1960s Supremes in Las Vegas.’”

With its abundance of sequins, bugle beads and crystal-encrusted accoutrements, Boardman’s wardrobe could easily outshine the costume closets of many showgirls. Flashy shoes, cardigans, trousers, necklaces, brooches... If it has bling factor, Boardman will wear it; he owns dozens of embellished pieces by brands like Lanvin, Junya Watanabe, Dries Van Noten, Gucci and H&M’s Conscious.

However, there is one name that appears more than others in Boardman’s closet. He has a growing stockpile of glittering delights made by London-based designer Ashish Gupta, including a custom-made matching shirt and bomber jacket emblazoned with his nickname, “Mr. Mickey.” Boardman recalls a show of Gupta’s that he saw during London Fashion Week; it was the designer’s Spring 2015 collection, which contained pieces featuring the faces of Kim Kardashian and the first two purchases he ever made at Barneys.

Despite many of his fledgling fashion dreams being indulged, Boardman has faced challenges in living out his sartorial fantasies because of his weight. He’s a member of WW (formerly Weight Watchers) and lamented that it wouldn’t work for him; Goldman replied, “Oh yeah?” Boardman did a fitting with a tailor Goldman brought in, and panels were added to the sides of the shirt. “It was a shock; it opened things up to me,” says Boardman. “I’ve bought extra fabric from Ashish and other designers for me, and she can make anything fit any person.”

The Proenza Schouler top that Boardman acquired from Goldman features prominently in a story that speaks volumes about his status as a style icon. “I was at this glamorous party,” he recalls. “It was an uptown thing—I was shocked I was even invited.” Boardman wore the shirt that night, with his tuxedo, and at one point realized that another guest, actress Liv Tyler, was wearing the same top. “I prefer women’s clothes because they’re fabulous, not because I want to be a woman or have a gender issue,” he explains. The Tyler sighting made Boardman feel quite chuffed, but one of fashion’s most beloved stars would give him an even bigger boost that evening. When event and street-style photographer Bill Cunningham noticed Boardman’s ensemble, he immediately asked if he could take Boardman’s picture with another fashionista at the party. “He asked if I had seen Iris Apfel,” says Boardman, “and dragged me around to find her.” Afterwards, Cunningham sent Boardman a photocopy of the duo’s picture with a note written on it that couldn’t be more fitting: “This is fashion.”
Dr. Liza Egbohgah, a Toronto-based manual osteopath, fell in love with the flair of Nigerian dressing before she started wearing it herself. “I loved looking through my mom’s old pictures because everyone was wearing traditional wax print dresses,” she remembers. “I’d ask my mother how I could get those kinds of pieces and she’d say, ‘I never thought you’d be interested in Nigerian clothes.’”

This might be due in part to Egbohgah’s international upbringing; she was born in Calgary and lived in both Libya and Malaysia while growing up. But she recalls that during visits to her ancestral home—her parents were born in the same Nigerian village—she was mesmerized by what women in the markets were wearing.

For Dr. Liza Egbohgah, a closet full of pieces from Nigeria allows her to stay connected to her roots.

By ODESSA PALOMA PARKER

Legacy Mode

KINDRED SPIRIT
Egbohgah wears a topper and shorts from Toronto-based brand Precious Threads by Abiola, founded by domestic abuse survivor Abiola Akinsiku.

PATERNAL INSTINCT

The luxe beadwork of a custom-made top and headpiece that Egbohgah wore to her father’s funeral pays tribute to his refined taste. “He never wore jeans a day in his life,” she recalls.

WINNING LOOK
“I have a sea of wax print pieces,” says Egbohgah of one element consistent in her collection. Here, a selection of artful earrings is nestled in the grooves of a traditional board game called Ncho.

LIVING OUT LOUD
Egbohgah fell in love with Nigerian style through old photos that were taken before the family was eventually forced to abandon traditional ways of dressing during British colonial rule.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY VAI YU LAW. HAIR AND MAKEUP, ESTHER KIESELHOF.
MEMORY BANK
Egbogah hopes to one day give her collection to her five-year-old niece, whom she describes as a fledgling fashion designer.

FIT TO PRINT
A dress by Enmy Kabiit featuring an Akwete fabric on the bodice is a favourite of Egbogah’s. The textile is native to the eastern region of the country where her family is from and reminds her of her grandmother’s old aprons.

CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION
Egbogah is so enamoured with eye-catching prints from Nigeria that she even developed iterations to use in her line of shoes, including the Ankara print seen here. “I look at fashion as art,” she says. “I’m investing in things that are beautiful and support creativity.”

BOLD CALLS
Fleeing the Biafran war meant that Egbogah’s family lost many of their personal belongings. A “desire to be connected to [her] roots” is one reason why she’s drawn to the work of local craftspeople and designers.

It was when she was in Malaysia that she developed a love of batik—the centuries-old craft work typically made with wax that also appears in the traditional dress of African nations. Attending an international school where uniforms were mandatory, Egbogah nurtured her interest in the creative potential of batik during art class, eventually making a small “collection of T-shirts and scrunchies.” As a teenager, she moved back to Calgary and found herself “wanting to fit in,” her style throughout that formative time consisted mostly of hoodies and pieces from early adopters of athleisure aesthetic, such as Triple Five Soul and Baby Phat.

Her sartorial appetites changed when she was in her early 20s—when her parents returned to live in their home country and her mother began bringing vibrantly printed Nigerian looks back to her family when she visited Canada. “That was a turning point for me,” says Egbogah. She started travelling to Nigeria more frequently, and a deep interest in the culture and style of the region took root.

Whether they be items given to her by her mom or the custom-made pieces Egbogah acquired for special events, the spectrum of craft techniques—opulent patterns, textures and embellishments abound in Nigerian fashion—is now stored in a specific closet space in her home. “I can’t say that I have a favourite—I have favourites,” she says with a laugh while mentally cycling through her collected wares, including purchases from designers like Emmy Kabiit and JZO. The front-runners include pink-hued floral pieces crafted for her wedding festivities and an ornately detailed top, skirt and matching headpiece she had made for her father’s funeral. “That I love because it was so intricate and really honoured him,” she says. “He loved extravagant things.”

Personalization is the cornerstone of Nigerian style; everyone who attends any social event is expected to arrive in an outfit that has never been worn by the wearer before. “You’re only supposed to wear them out once,” says Egbogah about occasionwear. “Afterwards, you give it to somebody else to wear or it’s given to a tailor to be reworn for more day-to-day wear.”

Letting go of such significant couture-level wardrobe items nagged at Egbogah, which is another reason why she cultivates a personal collection. When she travels to Nigeria now, one of her favourite things to source is hand-painted clothing. “They’ll start with plain cotton and then paint each one by hand,” she says of these artisanal items. “I consider that wearable art. Instead of focusing on buying paintings to hang, I’m interested in wearing paintings.”

In fact, Egbogah is so avid about preserving the creativity of Nigerian makers and designers that last year she attended Lagos Fashion Week (for only three days—it was all her busy schedule would allow). It was her first time at the event, and she returned to Toronto ready to start investing in the pieces she had seen. “It opened my eyes to so many contemporary Nigerian designers, and now I make an effort to collect their pieces and support them,” she says. This endeavour hasn’t been easy, though. Before she discovered Western-based African-focused e-commerce sites such as Ditto Africa, she wasn’t able to buy pieces from Nigeria due to monetary restrictions put in place by the Canadian government.

Thankfully, Egbogah has also been able to satiate her passion for Nigerian style from within Canada and has become a close friend of and collaborator with Precious Threads by Abiola designer Abiola Akinsiku. Akinsiku’s dynamic printed collections and the important story behind her brand deeply resonate with Egbogah, who owns over a dozen Precious Threads by Abiola pieces. “She’s a survivor of domestic violence,” she notes of Akinsiku, “and proceeds from sales go to help support other women who are victims of violence.”

When she reflects on the connection she has with Akinsiku—who created a three-piece capsule collection along with shoe embellishments for Egbogah’s orthopedic footwear brand, Dr. Liza—she highlights an inclination that is pervasive, but rarely spoken about openly, in creative professions. “I don’t know if it’s because of the work I do with fixing people, but for some reason I’m always drawn to pain,” says Egbogah. “I find that so much beauty comes out of other people’s pain.”

She also feels she has a kinship with the talent she crosses paths with on the TIFF circuit, where she has a yearly charity event in addition to a studio set up to give medical attention to the stars. Egbogah says she’s genuinely interested in the “joy and beauty” that come from the trauma and sadness that many creatives grapple with.

In much the same way as she strives to turn suffering into something good through her occupation, Egbogah chooses to focus on how she can amplify Nigerian creatives through growing her collection and, of course, wearing it. “It’s my pleasure, and I feel a sense of purpose when I get to put Nigeria in a positive light,” she says. “One of the reasons I’m so active in promoting Nigerian fashion is that the country gets so much negative publicity. But when you look at the beautiful fashion and music and art—things that move people... You can’t have a negative impression of Nigeria if you love all the wonderful local arts. And there’s a joy in celebrating heritage. That’s my blood—there’s a lot of people. They’re doing great things, and I want to share that with everyone.”