

LONG-HAIRED LOVERS

This season's hippest coats are shaggy and super-tactile. Karen Wheeler reports on the warm front coming in from the autumn catwalks.

Call it "Prada-lag" and I'm sure I'm not the only one to succumb to the syndrome whereby an outfit that looks completely unwearable – and very occasionally quite bonkers – when first unveiled on the catwalk, seems like the last word in desirability a couple of seasons later. And so it is with the tactile "teddy bear" coat. Made from cuddly mohair and in synthetic shades of off-yellow and green, it was hard to see how to incorporate such a style into one's wardrobe when it was first presented by Prada last winter – and it was easy to dismiss it as a catwalk whim. But one year on and it turns out that Miuccia Prada was, as usual, very prescient.

"The only thing I could think of was to work on colour and materials," she is reported to have said when asked for her inspiration at the time. And this autumn, it seems that just about everyone has been "working on

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materials", for texture is the thing and the super-tactile "shag" or "yeti" coat is everywhere. It's certainly not the only option – some designers, most notably Stefano Pilati at Yves Saint Laurent, have moved on to a rigorously tailored look – but it's certainly the most striking. There is something very irreverent, not to say a little rebellious, about these touchy-feely coats made from mohair, alpaca, looped wool, sheepskin or feathers.

The silhouette is a top-heavy one: a voluminous, above-the-knee coat with kimono or balloon sleeves over a short skirt or dress with long legs encased in black opaques. It's time to pump up the volume, it seems – in more ways than one.

"It's definitely not a winter of the quiet coat," says Olivia Richardson, head of fashion buying at Liberty, who points out that in the past few seasons coats have not been a standout wardrobe piece. "Last winter was all about the cocoon coat, which was more functional and not something that you would have bought as a wardrobe highlight. This season it is all about the statement coat – in terms of colour, texture and shape. Key styles at Liberty include "a beautiful

From far left: Fendi silk, leather and fur coat, £1,100. Aquascutum silk/cotton-mix coat, £1,800. Yves Saint Laurent wool and silk coat, £2,665. All autumn/winter 2008.

feathered design from Vanessa Bruno [£435] and a Martin Margiela coat [£985] with an enormous, oversized funnel neck, which is again fuzzy, hairy – very teddy bear”.

Given all the talk about recession chic and stealth dressing, who would have guessed that a once functional item of clothing would return in such a flamboyant way? Perhaps as an antidote to the gloom, designers have decided that it is a *bon moment* for a bit of fun. The truth is that very few of us actually need a new winter coat. But wanting a new winter coat – well, that’s a different matter. And perhaps because we’ve all become a little bored with black, navy or camel

allows us to do more interesting, individual designs.”

The fabric, which should make the wearer feel as if they are being cuddled by a big teddy bear, is key to the trend, creating the sensation that you are literally wrapping yourself up in luxury. “It is all about, texture, handle and the feeling of luxe,” says Earl – a dictum that has been applied across the Jaeger coat range. Other styles with the all-important “fluffiness factor” include an ultra-luxe alpaca coat with a balloon sleeve (£699) available in a smoky grey-black or forest green, a fabulous smoke-grey jacket made of oversized looped wool

This page, near right:
Dior mink coat, £18,880.
This page, far right:
Hermès’ sheepskin coat, about £7,475.

outlook is not. “There’s definitely an element of comfort and wanting to feel secure,” says Richardson. “It’s a very touchy-feely

approach that we are also seeing very strongly in knitwear. Also, people have generally become a bit bolder in how they dress. It’s the strong prints and colours that customers have really embraced.”

The shrug-on nonchalance and casual luxe of the shag coat – as opposed to tailored styles that leave you feeling neat but buttoned-up – is also part of the appeal. Mulberry’s fluffy Mongolian sheepskin parka in lipstick red or mushroom (£1,695) was inspired by the anti-fashion era of the early 1990s and, specifically, an iconic picture of Kurt Cobain dressed in a shaggy coat. The look is described as “Grunge Deluxe”. If this coat is *de trop* – for it is one of the more over-the-top styles, perhaps made with cat-walk impact in mind – more wearable options include an orangey-red teddy-bear effect sheepskin jacket, (£1,995) or an equally tactile coat in a gun-metal-coloured tinsel weave tweed (£695).

Long-haired shearling is very in vogue, and has been used to flamboyant



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cashmere and wool – or have such a coat in our wardrobe already – luxury brands are appealing to a sense of individuality to seduce us into the big-ticket purchase.

“There has to be a reason for buying a new coat – a point of difference,” says Belinda Earl, chief executive of Jaeger, which has surpassed itself on all coat fronts this season. The shaggy coat (£1,600), in two-tone long hair shearling in the Jaeger London collection is the label’s biggest statement. “Coats are very much part of the Jaeger heritage but this season they have become much more relevant and on-trend, which

(£399) and a frothy, latte-coloured sheepskin bomber (£799). But no one wants to feel as if they are wearing a duvet – or to look like *Sesame Street*’s Big Bird – so a lightness of touch (and cut) is essential. “All have an element of warmth without weight which is very important,” says Earl. “We live in a world where the weather no longer defines the season. Things need to have versatility. We say ‘all weather all times’. It is important that you can layer up or down.”

Consumer psychologists would no doubt make much of the fact that these fabrics are comforting at a time when the economic



effect for Temperley London's three-quarter-length Constance coat (£2,950, made to order). To see this coat is to want to stroke it first and then, if you are brave enough, offer it a good home. Made from glossy black Toscana sheepskin – known for its long hair and luxe pile – this is sheepskin, but not as we know it. “So many people do sheepskin now that I wanted to do something very exaggerated in order to make the coat stand out,” explains the designer Alice Temperley. “Having the fur on the outside makes it look a little more expensive.” It looks and feels, she notes, “like a gorilla”. (In current fashion terminology, the word would be “fierce” – meaning striking and fabulous.)

Hermès has also pushed the envelope on sheepskin, with several luxe and highly tactile versions, including a short coat (about £7,475) and a swingy trapeze version with short sleeves (about £7,650). Real fur, meanwhile, has been used for some of the most spectacular designs. As Erin Mullaney, buying director of Browns, says, “Fur is back

This page, far left: Jaeger's shearling coat, £1,600. This page, near left: Marni's lambskin coat, £2,250.

again in a big way this season, with lots of embellishments from Dior [£3,540-£22,420], with 24ct gold [from £3,850 at Fendi], or in beautiful, bright colours by Marni [from £3,245] and Dries Van Noten [£2,807-£9,125].” Hermès, on the other hand, has opted for a stealthier approach with a camel-coloured, bathrobe-style coat in shaved mink (about £28,750), cunningly disguised to look like sheepskin from a distance, as well as a swingy black coat in shorn mink with black fox-fur trim (£23,010).

And so to the all-important question: where and how to wear your shag-tastic coat? Your place of work, unless it is a highly creative one, is probably not the first location that springs to mind. “You have to have a lot of confidence to wear a piece like this and it helps if you are tall and slender,” says Temperley. But according to Jaeger's Earl, the look is “astonishingly versatile”. The label's shaggy shearling coat was shown over black jersey flares on the catwalk, but could easily be worn with a simple black dress and or just jeans.

Other designs seem to have been made with cocktails in mind, including the red Charla coat (£1,800) by Aquascutum, made from silk with a loose thread weave cut by hand to create a fringed, textured effect. “We've gone beyond tweed,” says the label's co-designer Michael Hertz, who points to The Diplomatic, a pink coat from the vintage collection (£1,995) featuring playful mink pompoms as evidence of the new mood in outerwear. “It sold out at a customer

preview in June, which shows that there is a strong demand for very special pieces.”

As to how to accessorise the shag coat, designers seem unanimous: a beanie hat and thigh boots injected casual glamour on the catwalk, but in real life a pair of high heels and all-forgiving black opaques are the more likely options. Worn with a short(ish) hemline or slung casually over a long, sinous evening dress, this, as Mullaney says, is “the kind of coat that becomes the outfit. All you need are heels and you're ready to go.” ♦

SHAGGY TALES

Aquascutum, 100 Regent St, London W1 (0800 282 922; www.aquascutum.com) and stockists. **Browns**, 24-27 South Molton St, London W1 (020-7514 0016 www.brownsfashion.com) and branch. **Dior**, 31 Sloane St, London SW1 (020-7172 0172; www.dior.com) and stockists. **Dries Van Noten**, see Browns and Liberty. **Fendi**, 20-22 Sloane St, London SW1 (020-7838 6288) and stockist. **Harvey Nichols**, 109-125 Knightsbridge, London SW1 (020-7235 5000). **Hermès**, 155 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7499 8856) and branches/stockists. **Jaeger**, 200 Regent St, London W1 (0845-0510 063; www.jaeger.co.uk) and branches. **Liberty**, 208-222 Regent St, London W1 (020-7734 1234). **Marni**, 26 Sloane St, London SW1 (020-7245 9520) and stockist. **Martin Margiela**, www.martinmargiela.com and stockists. **Mulberry**, 41-42 New Bond St, London W1 (020-7491 3900; www.mulberry.com) and branches/stockists. **Selfridges**, 400 Oxford St, London W1 (0800-123 400). **Temperley London**, 2-10 Colville Mews, London W11 (020-7229 7957; www.temperleylondon.com) and stockists. **Vanessa Bruno**, see Harvey Nichols, Liberty and Selfridges. **Yves Saint Laurent**, 171-172 Sloane St, London SW1 (020-7235 6706).

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