



Sophia Loren, circa 1960.

CIAO BELLA

With its STUDIED nonchalance, EMPHASIS on EXQUISITE QUALITY and DASH of LA DOLCE VITA, it's EASY to SEE how ITALIAN GIRL CHIC seduced the WORLD – and WHY the LOVE AFFAIR continues

words TESS DE VIVIE DE RÉGIE

Perhaps nothing sums up our collective idea of *la dolce vita* better than an iconic scene in Federico Fellini's 1960 film of the same name: Anita Ekberg splashing about in Rome's Trevi Fountain, looking like a Botticelli Venus in a strapless black gown designed by Piero Gherardi (who won the Oscar for Best Costume Design in the black-and-white category for his work on the film). This image has symbolised the heady mix of beauty and sensuality associated with Italian style for more than half a century – which is somewhat ironic, given Ekberg was Swedish by birth. And the charm of Italian style continues to prove catnip to 21st-century tastes: just look at TikTok and Instagram, which are awash with variations of hashtags like “Italian Girl Style” and “Italian Girl Summer”, capitalising on Italy's sun-drenched allure in which fashion plays a starring role.

What lies at the heart of Italian style's timeless appeal? According to Cesare Cunaccia, author of Assouline's 2023 book *Capri Dolce Vita*, it's *la dolce vita*, which he explains involves a great deal of *sprezzatura*, variously translated as nonchalance or effortlessness, a concept which, in turn, derives from Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, a 16th-century manual on courtly mores and manners. “[Italian style] is chic, but it doesn't seem too chic,” Cunaccia explains. “The key word is effortlessness: elegance but in a nonchalant way.”

“A touch of mystery is at the core,” continues Cunaccia – and then it is equal parts originality and, crucially, a dash of humour. There is crossover between Italian and French girl chic, but according to Cunaccia, it's the French's more sober approach to fashion that distinguishes the two nations.

“Italians are always joking, even about the most serious things,” he says, an attitude which apparently extends to how they dress. Cunaccia cites jewellery designer and Fendi scion Delfina Delettrez Fendi as an example of modern Italian chic. He compares her style to that of Silvana Mangano's character in Luchino Visconti's 1974 film *Conversation Piece*: glamorous, sophisticated but relaxed in a typically Italian way.

J.J. Martin, founder of maximalist ready-to-wear and homewares line La DoubleJ and an American who has been based in Italy for more than 20 years, echoes the sentiment. “[Italians] are not so obsessed with the amount in their wardrobes – they have a few great things,” she says. “Italians always manage to look sharp, tailored, pressed and put-together.” They favour high-quality accessories – the country is renowned for its leathersgoods heritage, after all. “Even when they're casual, they've got the right belt, they're wearing beautiful woven or beaded sandals,” Martin observes. Colour and pattern are also key components of the Italian girl chic equation, a philosophy Martin channels in her own designs: “I've never seen anyone wear black to an Italian wedding,” she laughs.



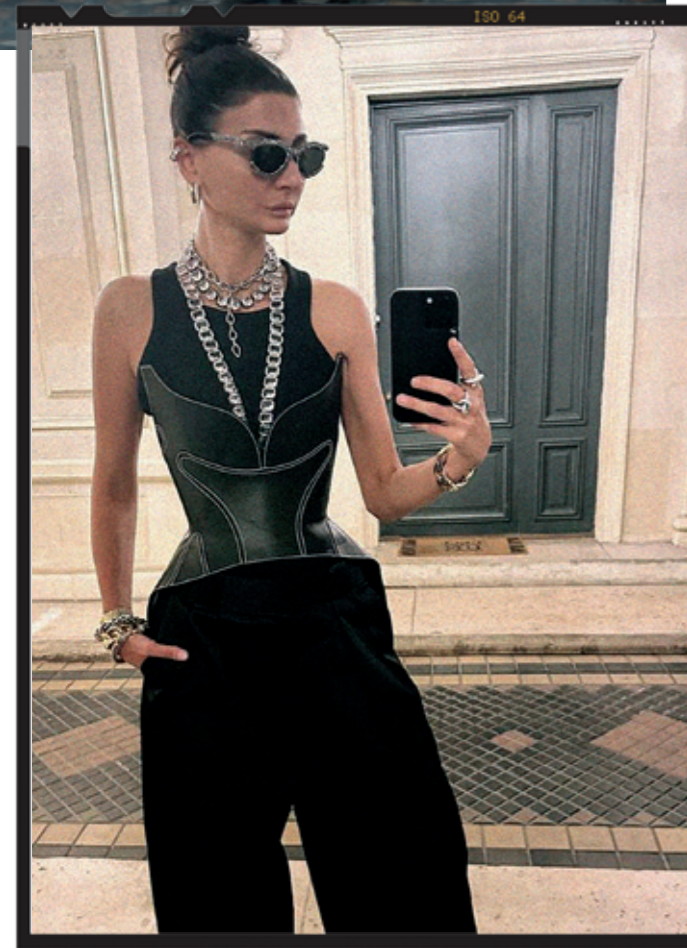
As a renowned street-style photographer at fashion weeks across the globe, Lee Oliveira regularly encounters some of the world's most elegant women. What's his take on what makes Italian girls just so stylish? "Their ability to effortlessly mix designer pieces with casual and everyday items," he reflects. He names influencer Erika Boldrin, stylist Georgia Tal, Arianna Casadei, CEO of the shoe brand Casadei and Swarovski creative director Giovanna Engelbert as "women whose looks consistently captivate me at Milan Fashion Week. Whenever I think of stylish Italian women, I'm always struck by how effortlessly they carry themselves both in and out of the fashion spotlight. Their sense of style is impeccable and seems so natural."

There can be a conservative quality to how Italians dress every day: crisp tailoring and preppy sports-inspired pieces are commonplace and, incidentally, hallmarks of the 'quiet luxury' trend, associated with Italian fashion houses Loro Piana and Max Mara. "Italian women have a keen eye for quality, opting for well-made pieces that stand the test of time," says Oliveira.

One can't decode Italian girl chic without examining its roots in '60s cinema and the silver-screen sirens of the period. Think Sophia Loren, Gina Lollobrigida, Claudia Cardinale and Monica Vitti, whose signature looks – figure-hugging bodices, full skirts, feline flicks – have long influenced what the world perceives as Italian style. There's a clear throughline between that archetype and the visual vocabulary employed by the likes of Dolce & Gabbana today.

Marella Agnelli – born Princess Marella Caracciolo di Castagneto – remains one of the 20th century's most influential tastemakers. In 1953, she married Gianni Agnelli, then Italy's richest man, thus joining the powerhouse family behind Fiat and Ferrari, nicknamed "Italy's Kennedys". Agnelli's effortless personal style earned her a place among Truman Capote's "Swans", a mid-century coterie of jet-set beauties celebrated for their exquisite taste. And, of course, there's Elsa Peretti, who in 1970 created for Tiffany & Co. the sculptural Bone Cuff (and much more besides), an icon of modern-jewellery design.

The new guard of Italian women making its mark on the fashion world includes Deva Cassel, the Franco-Italian daughter of actress, model



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and latterly Bond Girl Monica Bellucci and actor Vincent Cassel. At 19 years old, she has already fronted four campaigns for Dolce & Gabbana perfumes, walked the runway for Jacquemus and been named by Dior as an ambassador of the house. She is set to star in upcoming Netflix series *The Leopard*, based on Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's historical novel, playing Angelica Sedara – a role made famous by Claudia Cardinale in the 1963 film adaptation.

Celebrated for her more-is-definitely-more aesthetic, Giovanna Battaglia Engelbert is indisputably one of the standard-bearers of Italian girl chic in 2024. The street-style darling and former magazine stylist was named as Swarovski's first-ever creative director in 2020. One could also cite Beatrice Borromeo Casiraghi, who is frequently classed as one of the world's most elegant royals: she's a member of the Monégasque royal family via her marriage to Prince's son Pierre. The journalist, model and director is routinely dressed in ladylike looks by Dior on the events circuit, having been made a brand ambassador in 2021.

Getty Images: @giovannaengelbert; @gildaambrosio.

Margherita Maccapani Missoni, whose grandparents founded the iconic knitwear label seven decades ago, has long cut a stylish and colourful figure on front rows and red carpets. In 2023, she established MACCAPANI, a genderless and early noughties-inspired line (there's lots of tie-dye, neon hues and slip dresses) that's stocked at Browns Fashion and Nordstrom. Then there's Giorgia Tordini and Gilda Ambrosio, street-style stars-turned-designers of The Attico, a line renowned for its glitzy partywear that's been worn by high-profile names such as Hailey Bieber and Dua Lipa. Between The Attico's Instagram and their two respective personal Insta accounts, Tordini and Ambrosio boast a combined follower count of more than two million on the platform.

Rising quickly are also the Italian actors Sabrina Impacciatore, Beatrice Grannò and Simona Tabasco, who were catapulted to

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international fame by the second season of HBO's *The White Lotus*, set in a sun-drenched Sicilian resort. The three are now on high rotation at international red-carpet events, with Grannò and Tabasco tapped by Kim Kardashian to co-front a SKIMS Valentine's Day campaign last year.

"Guess who I am," Jennifer Coolidge's Tanya McQuoid asks Impacciatore's resort-manager character, Valentina, in one of the most amusing – and much-memed – scenes from *The White Lotus*, season two, when McQuoid arrives for a scooter tour of the resort's environs dressed in a pink dress and scarf, the latter draped around her head.

"Peppa Pig?" Valentina replies (improvising, it turns out), before McQuoid reveals she is channelling Monica Vitti.

"Monica Vitti's dead, but yes," Valentina deadpans.

Giving French Girls a run for their eternal influencer money, Italian Girls continue to inspire the world. Notes Cunaccia: "Even for those who have never been to Italy, [Italian style] is a kind of dream."

Cin cin to that. HB



OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP Sabrina Impacciatore; Giovanna Engelbert. THIS PAGE, FROM TOP Monica Bellucci; Elsa Peretti; The Attico's Gilda Ambrosio and Giorgia Tordini.