



**RIGHT:**  
Inside Agatha Ruiz  
de la Prada Store

## IN STEP WITH SPAIN

The strength of Spanish fashion is its abundant variety and its ever expanding constellation of names and ideas. Neetinder Dhillon does a quick drive-by while in Madrid and suggests a shopping holiday there.

Few associate Spain with high fashion even while slipping into a Manolo Blahnik or shouldering a Loewe. This is the land which gave the world Cristobal Balenciaga... yet rarely does anyone think of heading to Spain for fashion. A walk along the streets of Madrid and you realise how fashion conscious the city really is. Quite like Milan, fashion seems to come easily to the Madrilenos, their sense of style is almost palpable. From the teenager on the street to the shop assistant, all make a style statement. Your greatest faux pas here would be to tog yourself out in the tourist uniform of shorts and

Reeboks; a look popularised by the Great American Tourist, and certainly the look to be avoided. Not because the easy-going Madrilenos is going to look down his nose at you but because you will feel out of place.

The Spanish textile industry is the fifth largest in the European Union and its footwear industry has a sizeable share of the global export market, third largest in the world. Stands to reason then that a large part of your Spanish experience will be discovering the wide variety of home-grown fashions. Look for good clothes and expect the ultimate in shoes and bags. Thankfully Spanish fashions celebrate the woman; remember they were the first to ban the emaciated size zero models. To buy clothes here you don't have to look like runway models.

The strength of Spanish fashion is its abundant variety and its ever expanding constellation of names and ideas. And there is more to it than Zara, Mango, Castro or even Massimo Dutti. You would have to have been living under a rock not to have heard of Syb-



**TOP&RIGHT:**  
Alma Aguilar's  
Spring/Summer  
2008; and the  
designer herself

Photos on this page: Juan Serrano Corbella

illa Sorondo, heralded as the first fresh wind to blow out of Spain since Cristobal Balenciaga. Sybilla went on to move her atelier to Milan, but Madrid (and Barcelona) resound to the duelling of designers like Pedro del Hierro, Francis Montesinos, Roser Marce, Adolfo Dominguez, Antonio Miro, Jota Mas Ge... the list is endless.

In Madrid, Salamanca and Serrano are choc-a-bloc with designers of all hues. One heartening thought is that fashion here is still relatively affordable. A hundred forty Euro for a silk shirt by Angel Schlessler almost seems a steal (considering it is

a keeper) or for that matter a hundred and sixty Euro for a green crocodile clutch.

Ángel Schlessler began with the designer Juan Rufete and a year later designed his first menswear collection for the Autumn-Winter 1984-85 season. A regular at the Cibeles Fashion Show he has presented his women's wear collections every year since 1988. His clothes are imminently wearable and the look is dynamic, urban, ultra-feminine if at times androgynous, but sexy all the same. A strong look, not for the faint-hearted. Complimenting the clothes is a dazzling array of bags and shoes. The perfect example of his look is his poplin and satin trench coats from his spring/summer 2007 collection.

From the urban chic of Schlessler, I went on to the strong

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ON THIS PAGE:  
Angel Schlessler's  
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colours and graphics of avant-garde designer Agatha Ruiz de la Prada, who's not only into fashion for the entire family, but also focuses on items for the office and the home. From colour pencils to backpacks, from ties to dresses, Agatha believes in colouring your world with riotous rebellion. She has studiously steered away from global trends and speaks her own but very global language. Her designs are coloured by optimism and inspire humour yet there is nothing garish about them: her creations are inherently stylish. Load up on the zaniest of ties to spark up the dulllest of business suits or colour your closet with playfulness hard to resist. Her Spring/Summer 2008 is as vibrant as it gets, inclusive of





FROM THE LEFT:  
Joyeria Suarez; Sara  
Navarro Shoes; and  
the designer herself



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her trademark hearts, clouds, flowers and swirls.

The sartorial encounter continues with Alma Aguilar a young designer whose first prêt-à-porter collection came out of her small studio in April 1999. By the November of the same year she opened her own showroom and introduced her atelier (high fashion bridal gowns). Her look is unashamedly feminine: simple, romantic and spiritual. Every collection is built on the previous one like a painting; with colour and style painted on by a sable brush. The Spring/Summer '08 is an ultra feminine, nostalgic look at the '40s in pastels with whites, greys and beiges dominating. Yet there is nothing colourless about it and has an almost bohemian touch. Trends are not for her and while the designs change from year to year, collection to collection the inspiration remains the same. Quizzed Alma says, "For me each catwalk is a step to the next one." Delicate yokes and peter-pan collars, waists are enhanced with embroidered sashes, swirling skirts, loose-fitting trousers, in both long and short versions, and balloon skirts combined with detailed mini jackets, sporting big pockets and flowing sleeves. Poplin and cotton are effortlessly blended with delicate gauze and silk crêpe. Lace, bows and other appliqué, add a delicate trim to garments and hint at the earlier collection.

Next stop is Joyeria Suarez, on 63 Serrano Street, the jewellers to Spain's who's who. Exquisite diamonds, pearls... turned into jewellery that is as classic as it is

modern. In fact Suarez have been dubbed as one of Europe's most important jewellers. And for a reason. Spring 2007 was all about Veris, a collection using precious stones in intense colours, especially sapphires, but also rubies and emeralds. The collection is a reinterpretation of classic lines of the Napoleonic era. Suarez has everything from the casual to the most formal; a stop here is highly recommended. For the 2008 collection the jewellers are collaborating with designer Carmen

March, one of Spain's new designers.

Next stop Purification Garcia, a fashionable stop for both men and women and Sara Navarro for amazing shoes and bags.... It is an endless journey made difficult by the fact that the smartest names in Spain are reflected in this fashionable district of Madrid. If a shopping holiday is on the cards, forget Milan, think Madrid. The Spring/Summer 2008 collections will be in by the time you read this. ■



Photo: Loewe

LEFT:  
Loewe's leather  
accents