



Fur coat, no tights

What the fashion crowd wear when it's freezing

fashion

Country chic no longer a contradiction

The issue of what to wear outdoors has been solved, says **Anna Murphy**



When Arabella Hoskyns-Abraham got married she found herself with a

problem. Not the man she married. She knew beforehand that he was, as she puts it, laughing, "obsessed with country pursuits. I had already learnt that there is always something to shoot, all year round." Rather it was what she was going to wear when she was attempting to keep up with said pursuing. "There were two options: things that felt too unisex and things that were designed for women but felt too smart, too new."

Matters came to a head when the couple moved from London to Northumberland seven years ago. Life became about "always being outside," she tells me. And about "lurchers and boys." In that order? "In that order." Hoskyns-Abraham's solution — to the clothing part of the equation at least — was her brand, Bella Hoskyns. Which she launched in 2016. "I wanted clothes that could do everything, that I could wear with jeans, wear shooting, wear all year round."

So-called country pursuits — in the sense of hunting, shooting and fishing — are not for me. A few years ago I did, in fact — to paraphrase *Withnail and I* — go shooting by mistake. And what a fascinating insight it was into how the other half lives — not to mention kills. But I have no intention of going again. Even so, I know a good brand when I see one and if it is British, then so much the better. And if it's more, its purview is to present some winning solutions to the problem of country chic — all too often a contradiction in terms — then so much, much the better. Besides, country pursuits can be what you choose to pursue in the country, methinks. Yomping cuts. As I believe, does sitting down for — to use Yorkshire parlance — "tea and a bun".

So while I don't have call for a pair of Bella Hoskyns' handstooth breeks (£325, bellahoskyns.com) — and if you have to ask what breeks are then I am guessing you don't either — I am very much in the market for this bomber jacket, right (£368). Hoskyns-Abraham's inspiration was, she tells me, that long-ago (1981) Balmoral honeymoon tweed of Princess Diana's, in a brown check with elasticated hem. "I always loved that jacket," Hoskyns-Abraham says. And now she has one. And so do many of her clients. Another bestseller are her high-waisted wide-leg Hepburn trousers, available in black crepe, navy lambswool or dark denim (£210, £295 and £198 respectively). I am a fan, too, of the white brushed-cotton frill-neck shirt (£135). Also very 1981, in a good way.



Fenton & Co ring and, below, Bella Hoskyns bomber jacket

Big gems from a tiny company

Check out this stonker. It's a real and — just in case you need it pointing out — big emerald from petite British brand No.2 Fenton & Co is a year-old, website-led operation that was founded to solve another kind of problem. First, it wanted to make buying a posh ring easy and un intimidating. Second, it wanted to make the costs — as well as the origins of the stone — transparent.

As its chief executive Laura Lambert explains, stones usually pass through up to 12 pairs of hands and at each point the price can double. "What is the price of what is at the end of the supply pebble? I don't think in the past it has been fair to consumers how that price is determined," she says.

Fenton & Co goes direct to the miners and/or local dealers — "we have one man in Sri Lanka who literally pulls sapphires out of the ground in front of our eyes" — and so cuts out the many middlemen. It guarantees that all its stones are ethically mined and each is quality-checked by its Mumbai-based expert — previously the head of manufacturing at De Beers — before it makes its way to the UK.

"Other brands will charge anything from twice to ten times what we do," continues Lambert, who has divested herself of the cost of having shops. "How much you pay depends where you buy your ring, and also the size of the stone. The bigger the stone, the bigger the profit someone takes. Whatever your budget, no one wants to pay double the true value or more." Her focus is on coloured stones, "because they offer so much better value for money". You can also make an appointment at the London offices. "I imagine you will be less than astonished to learn that this ring is still not cheap (£2,500, fentonandco), but the brand claims that it would cost you between two and four times more elsewhere. In case anyone is wondering, you could have it in time for a Valentine's Day proposal,

although some of the bespoke designs — there at 3,000 options — might take longer.

Not that when it comes to the matter of choosing the ring's 21st-century engagement ring origins are always what they first appear, Lambert says. "We get men who say they are choosing a surprise, and then it becomes clear that their girlfriends might have done them a Pinterest board or get a friend of theirs to drop a hint. The woman wants the man to feel he is making the choice, but she also wants to ring the bell going to wear. It's like the couple is doing a dance." I know. Let's not go there. But still. Nice rings. Instagram: @annamurphy



Above: dress, £85, boots, £290. Right: dress, £85. All available at arket.com from February

I have a very stylish friend who has a very important job at a very grand store that sells every luxury label you could think of. This friend has a secret. It is that the place she likes to shop most of all, the place where she bought that cream trouser suit two years ago that she still finds hard not to wear all the time, is on the high street.

I have two more fashion friends who are more than happy delighted, in fact — to come clean about their high street habit. More on them in a minute. What you need to know now is that this habit of theirs is another five-letter word. Arket. This Scandinavian brand, founded in 2017, is a lesser-known stalwart to the ubiquitous H&M and has six shops in the UK. Its aesthetic is about simplicity; about what might best be called a modernised classicism; about a quality that is, alas, unusual on the 21st-century high street. Arket's clean lines may be contiguous with those of Cos, another member of the H&M Group, but they come minus Cos's tendency towards oddness, clumsiness, and its obsession with asymmetry and a boxy cut.

Here is the everywoman appropriate answer to how to look — as the fashion pack like to put it — relevant. No risk while wearing Arket of coming over as one of those difficult architect types, the kind who never get their buildings built. Yet no risk either of coming over as old hat or, worse still, over-hat. In short, if you don't already have some Arket in your wardrobe, you should. My present ever-after pick: some sleek navy wool combat trousers, reduced to £45, which, like most styles, come in sizes 8 to 18 (arket.com for it, I asked).

"Arket is practically all I wear," exclaims Ellie Pithers, the fashion features editor at Vogue who majors in a variety of timeless contemporaneity



that most of us would kill for. Pithers looks like the sort to wear stealth luxury labels such as Lemaire — and she does — but Arket is her sartorial bread and butter; or perhaps, more accurately, tea and biscuits. "Fashion editors often talk about, say, 'I was in just the right shade of biscuit,'" she observes, "which can sound ludicrous to non-believers, but it makes the difference." An oversized V-neck cardigan in what I will call Hobnob, and a crew-neck sweater alternative, tick that box pretentiously well (£89 and £69, arket.com).

It's true that no one does taupe like Arket does. Its stretch-cotton wide-leg trousers (£69) are a match in appearance and quality to some I have clocked elsewhere — for which read posh-where — at many times the price. I could see Katharine Hepburn in these slacks. Indeed, I could see her going to buy an Arket more generally. The long quilted vest in — you guessed it — beige would have taken the biscuit (enough) in *On Golden Pond* (1991). I spotted something similar on the front row at the Chanel couture in Paris yesterday from, again, a brand that would have charged a couple of grand for it. (I asked.) Yet colour in the full-spectrum sense of the word is also something Arket nails. "The palette is so much more refined compared to most of what is

“One inspiration was that long-ago Balmoral tweed of Princess Diana’s”

