

CHECKmate

This season's tartan is a little bit punk; a little bit New Romantic, but you need to wear it with a whole new twist. **Laia Farran Graves** shows us how...

One of my favourite skirts when I was three was a pleated tartan mini; I wore it to death. Since then, tartan has had a (forgive me) chequered history thanks to its strong association with middle-aged tourists and overly keen golfers. So I'm not ashamed to admit I haven't attempted the tartan look since, despite its regular presence on the catwalk. This season, though, tartan has changed, and I'm contemplating another Highland fling.

It was huge in the Seventies, not only for little girls, but also for the punk identity, paired with leather, safety pins, chains and heavy make-up. In the Eighties, the New Romantics reprised the look, matching it with over-the-top frilled white shirts and big belts. The Nineties saw it back with a vengeance, championed by designers such as Alexander McQueen, John Galiano and Vivienne Westwood. Westwood has become most associated with the fabric, even designing her own tartan, MacAndreas – named after her husband – which featured in her exquisite 1993 Anglomania collection.

Fast-forward 15 years, and the autumn/winter 2008 catwalks were awash with tartan again, this time combining both previous punk and New Romantic influences and worn in a refreshing, clashing way.

D&G, for example, mismatched the fabrics ("checks on checks"), while Roberto Cavalli styled his Just Cavalli collection (top right) with animal prints.

Love the country? You'll adore McQueen's take on it, using layers of oversized plaids and blanket-like coats. If you're wanting a more tailored look, Balenciaga's fitted jackets – just-in at Matches (£1595, 60–64 Ledbury Road, W11 2AJ; 020 72210255) are perfectly sculptured.

As we tighten our patent-leather belts, it's good to know there are

some really good high-street alternatives. For that on-trend fashionista look, wear a short dress or skirt and clash different tartans, even adding animal prints or bold colours into the mix. Check out Primark's great wraparound, tulip dress (right; £14, 54–56 High Road, NW6 4HJ; 020 7624 4664). Or for full-length drama, and a nod to D&G and McQueen, get your hands on a Per Una ankle-length skirt (£75, Marks & Spencer, 113 Kensington High Street, W8 5SQ; 020 7938 3711; www.marksandspencer.com), a ruffled check shirt like the one at ASOS (£28, www.asos.com) and high boots for that just-in-from-a-ride-in-the-country look. For the more urban, tailored girl, however, it's all about pairing a pencil skirt with a waisted, fitted jacket and a wide belt over it all for an hourglass shape.

You can play it safe by adding just a splash of tartan; match a shirt to your favourite jeans or wear a skirt with a plain polo neck. Even better, arm yourself with accessories. Dune in Whiteleys has some fantastic platform boots (below) or check out Jonathan Aston's tartan tights (£7, www.sockshop.co.uk) – ideal under your favourite LBD. We love the French Connection bag (bottom right) that's bold enough to be on-trend and big enough to carry a laptop. But for the subtlest tartan touch, simply pin Freedom's oversized corsage (below) to your lapel. Check it.

CATWALK TO CLOSET



WAREHOUSE



THE BROOCH

Freedom, £15
Topshop, 42/44
Kensington High Street,
W8 4PE; 020 7938 1242;
www.topshop.com

THE BOOTS

Dune, £80
Whiteleys, Queensway, W2 4SB
020 7792 4105; www.dune.co.uk

JUST CAVALLI



PRIMARK

THE BAG

French Connection
168–170 Kensington
High St, W8 7R
020 7937 4665;
www.frenchconnection.com

