

My awareness about the popularity of animal prints began with my friend's passion for them...she is from South Africa and has numerous outfits with animal prints. She is naturally attracted to linen, clothes, tableware with either tiger stripes, zebra or leopard prints. So I wondered, when did man start imitating nature?

It seems that animal prints add a wild, exotic and untamed element to any season – at home and on the body – these prints give the wearer a boost of confidence and air of sophistication. Looking back at history, I found that initially it was the real skins that were 'prized' possessions before wildlife conservation became a serious issue.

Since hunting or owning the real skin was an offence, prints of the real skin or fur became popular. A look at fashion history shows that these prints never went out of fashion, be it black and white zebra stripes, or yellow and black tiger stripes or the leopard's unique spots – on dresses, scarves, bags, shoes or hats!!

Chic appeal

Fashion icons have used animal prints, models flaunt them on runways, Hollywood loves them and celebrities have at least a dozen prints making it hugely popular and lending a designer appeal to the wild print.



ANIMAL PRINTS – CHIC AND CLASSY

Be it a leopard print or the classic black and white zebra, the popularity of wild animals for their unique fur prints is a classic fashion statement, finds Aruna Rathod

-By Aruna Rathod



Since they are adapted from nature, animal prints are pleasing to the eye, very versatile and add an exotic touch to clothes and interiors. In the past, the real skins were synonymous with luxury and wealth.

And most importantly, people love prints. And with so many different prints to choose from, there is a perfect print for everyone.

The chic movement started in the 1950s when fashion designer Christian Dior's muse Mitzah Bricard was fascinated by the leopard print. Dior followed his heart and infused his accessories, lines, and campaigns with leopard prints. This catapulted animal prints to a level of chic sophistication and elegance. No woman's ensemble was complete without a touch of leopard.

The 1960s saw a whole new revolution spawned by the Hippie Movement for animal prints, emulated in different new rebellious colors.



Wild side

From tiger stripes to cheetah spots, the patterns of the world's big cats have been constants in the fashion world. Leopards have been a favourite with movies and the wild cat brought fashion into daily lives. The movie Tarzan the Ape Man was a huge success when it was released by MGM in 1932. The revealing, leopard-patterned clothing of stars Johnny Weissmuller as Tarzan and Maureen O'Sullivan as Jane created a sensation for leopard and cheetah prints during the 1930s. Blouses, coats, and scarves were some of the popular items made in animal prints and wearing these added to the independence of spirit for women.

Kruger Safari – The real wild life

Watching animals in the wild is thrilling. A trip to the Kruger National Park took me into the home of lions, leopards, giraffes, rhinos, zebras and impalas. While zebras are easy to spot because of their unique skin, and the giraffes because they 'stand' out, the lions are well-camouflaged against the dry yellow grass.

A safari in a strong 4x4 jeep, takes you through the jungle and you can watch the majestic animals saunter past – impalas in groups prance around, the graceful giraffes saunter past, zebras literally stand out in a herd – black and white!

From your room that is designed like a tent, it's a pleasure to watch the action at the stream of water remaining from a dried up river - the magnificent wild life unfolds in front of you – elephants, impalas, zebras, giraffes and the white rhino ramble in for water. Water buffaloes, called the Cape buffalo, that are gigantic, move with ease, have a drink of water and walk out.

The evening safari offered me the treat of watching a young leopard – our guide says he's young because his nose is not pitch black. The leopard, lies on his back his paws in the air, relaxing after having his fill of his prey, an impala. He looks up, nonchalantly, stares as if we don't exist and goes back to sleep, changing his pose to on his side, as we watch enraptured – his stomach moving up and down as he sleeps digesting his food.

A leopard in the wild left me mesmerized and no wonder the print is so popular.