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Outdoor Gear Is In

Why urbanites are adopting Everest-worthy 'gorpcore' wear for the everyday

By JACOB GALLAGHER

GORPCORE, named for the trail-mix acronym that's short for "good ol' raisins and peanuts," represents the convergence of outdoorsy gear and more quotidian men's fashion. Think of the technical parkas and backpacks you'd wear while nibbling on nuts and dried fruit during a hike up a mountain. Now transfer that same gear to city streets, maybe paired with your prosaic sneakers.

The term "gorpcore"—coined by New York Magazine's style site the Cut in 2017—has been bubbling up in men's fashion for a few years. It emerged as an outdoor-specific offshoot of the 2010s' normcore trend, which recontextualized humble, pragmatic clothes as lust-worthy fashion. The defining gorpian image might be a photo (see D2) of taciturn singer Frank Ocean trekking to a Paris fashion show in 2019 wearing a fitted, clementine-orange jacket by 159-year-old Swiss mountaineering brand Marmot and a greenish beanie from 32-year-old North Vancouver outdoor brand Arc'teryx, with bluejeans and hiking boots. He looks as if he's wandered off the Pacific Crest Trail and into the Tuileries.

That Mr. Ocean wore Arc'teryx and Marmot during fashion week and not, say, Prada is telling. Gorpcore is not about designer labels cynically co-opting the outdoor look, creating fragile mountaineering boots that look the part but would falter on the trail. It's about a deep appreciation of genuine, all-weather brands stretching from Japan's And Wander to California's Patagonia.

Those two brands represent two distinct classes of gorpcore. And Wander, a Tokyo-based label founded in 2011, is one of several relatively new brands that sell high-design gear that could nevertheless withstand a toe-tingling winter squall. Think fleeces with reflective details and sturdy pocket-packed poly pants. Also in this category: fellow Japanese labels Snow Peak and F/CE, the Swedish cold-weather brand Houdini, and Gyakusou, a Nike offshoot focused on running garb.

The other class of gorpcore brands—including REI, Marmot and Patagonia—are long-established stalwarts traditionally valued for placing function over design. Freshly coveted by young gorpcore fanatics, this group includes seasoned global brands like Helly Hansen (Norway) and Goldwin (Japan), and cultier, trail-rooted labels such as Gramicci, Manastash and La Sportiva.

The events of the past year have turbocharged the gorpcore trend. As Tristin Dorsey, a 22-year-old gorp zealot, said, when gyms closed due to Covid lockdowns, more people started exercising outside and identifying with that lifestyle. "I find myself outdoors most days, whether it's hiking or climbing or stuff like that," said Mr. Dorsey, a student in Fort Collins, Colo. On the trail and in his everyday life he wears go-anywhere water-resistant Helly Hansen nylon pants and thick-soled yet handsome hiking boots from Italian label Roa.

Gorp fans worship practicality, but they also cherish the hints of high design that brands lace into their outdoor gear. La Sportiva's trail shoes offer traction but aren't just functional black blobs. They come in enticing yellow and olive color schemes. Snow Peak's MM FR Riders Down Jacket isn't just waterproof and wind-resistant, it also has an intriguing asymmetrical zip design. And while Patagonia would never be mistaken for a Parisian fashion label, its plush fleeces boast

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LOOK, MA, NO HANDLES
These kitchen cabinets in a Brooklyn factory conversion (by local firm Alloy Development) exemplify the new hardware-free look.

What's Hot, What's Kaput in 2021

We asked 200 design pros which trends feel fresh vs. finished as we enter a new year. They forecast a hunger for hushed, murky rooms and hardware-less kitchen cupboards—and a quick fade for farmhouse white and open shelving.

OUT



Lab-Like Bathrooms
While we still need me-time in the bath to maintain our sanity, the white-on-white loo has lost its allure. “Bathrooms have become less austere, less like operating theaters,” said Boston designer Mally Skok. Once-popular materials are faltering. “Bookmatched marble is so beautiful, but it’s almost echo-y white. It feels cold,” said Ms. Skok. And Sara Hillery, a designer in Richmond, Va., finds fabricated quartz looks too manufactured: “Design trends are headed toward a softer, more natural look, and these man-made options fall short.”

IN



Open-Air Showers
Meanwhile, the al fresco shower has acquired powerful appeal, part of the continuing push to “make the outdoor as well-designed and comfortable as the indoor,” as New York architect West Chin put it. San Francisco designer Jay Jeffers, who often installs showers like the one at right on clients’ properties in Napa Valley, points to the dreamy sense of escape they conjure. “You’re almost in a different world—Mexico or the Cayman Islands or Anguilla—somewhere else that’s not your home.”

Glitzy Textiles

Miami designer Allen Saunders, among others, foresees a rejection of slick surfaces in general. Mr. Jeffers zeroed in on shiny fabrics, a played-out way to bestow a design scheme with glossy glamour. “They give this connotation of a dresser room, which people are just not as excited about these days,” he said. As pillows or upholstery, these light-catching lamés and shimmery satins not only look chilly, they skimp on tactile comfort. “They’re a little harder in terms of their touch and hand,” he said.

Fabrics That Feel Good

We’re gravitating to touchable textiles like velvet, mohair and soft bouclé, said Robbie McMillan, co-owner and lead designer of AubreyMaxwell in San Francisco. “Bouclé is everywhere,” concurred Andrew Kline, design director at New York’s Workshop/APD. “We have nowhere to go in our Chanel blazers, so we’re translating the look to sofas,” he said. Elizabeth Cooper, another Bay Area designer, highlighted furry alternatives such as alpaca (see the Arhaus pillow at right), while Bethesda, Md., designer Marika Meyer likes the tactility of crewel embroidery.



Chaos-Courting Open Shelving

Sure, floating shelves look great in photos when styled by a pro or even by a layperson with a good eye. The rest of us struggle to keep exposed tableware looking organized and pretty, which has scuttled this “deconstructed kitchen” trend. “For some, open shelving always felt too cluttered,” said Kobi Karp, principal of the eponymous architecture and interior-design firm, in Miami. Another reason to shelf open shelving: Dishes end up covered in (unappetizing, time-consuming) dust and grease.

Neat Cabinets Sans Hardware

“Since cabinetry usually takes up most of the space in kitchens, a ton of exposed hardware can create an eyesore,” said Houston designer Nina Magon. For a serenely seamless facade and an open-sesame effect, look for push latches. Also good: drawers with grabbable undersides like the ones at right, made by London kitchen company Lanserring. The result is a decidedly more tidy kitchen. “It expresses the less-is-more approach and helps focus on the beauty of the cabinetry and surfaces,” said Ms. Magon.



Matte Black Fixtures

Industrial and farmhouse trends ushered in flat black faucets, but they’re now heading out. “Black is one-dimensional...really visually bold and heavy,” said Indianapolis designer Whitney Parkinson. The color “immediately draws your eye to an element that shouldn’t have much relevance.” Ms. Parkinson also noted that some manufacturers spray on the black finish, which means it will eventually scratch off. “People want pieces they feel will age really well,” she said, versus ones that must be replaced in a few years.

Faucets You Can Talk To

Want to minimize contact with germ-y handles and taps? Just connect Siri or Alexa to a voice-activated fixture. “You can say, ‘Faucet, two cups of water.’ You put the pan under and it dispenses two cups!” said Sacramento, Calif., designer Kerrie Kelly. You can also program the flow’s temperature and duration for, say, rinsing dishes. Designer Dennese Guadeloupe Rojas, in Silver Lake, Md., points out that touchless faucets don’t get dirty in the first place, so finishes like matte white, as on the version at right by Jason Wu for Brizo, stay looking clean.



Modern Farmhouse

With apologies to Chip and Joanna Gaines, who popularized the farmhouse look on HGTV’s “Fixer Upper,” its white shiplap walls, fauxtiques and dark metal details are being sent to pasture. “People want home to represent who they are and the life they’ve led,” said Dallas designer Michelle Nussbaumer. “Farmhouse is too quiet, too not-real.” Another agri-feature getting the ax: sliding barn doors. Even closed they leave gaps, so they only work in places where sound and privacy are not an issue, said Mr. Karp. Places like a barn.

Dusky Rooms

Design pros are noting a shift to darker, moodier spaces, like this emerald-enveloped bar at right, by Atlanta designer Melanie Turner. Ms. Kelly noted that in kitchens, warm woods are being mixed with deep green or blue paint. Mr. Jeffers predicts those colors, plus dark gray, will also surface in bedrooms: “Deep tones evoke calm and make the perfect sleeping atmosphere.” Andrea Goldman’s team, in Chicago, creates at least one cozy, relaxing space per project: “We start with wall color, using darker jewel hues.” —Kathryn O’Shea-Evans



PANEL BENDOV (ALLOY KITCHEN); GETTY (BATHROOM); WHITNEY LAWS (GALLERY STOCK) (OUTDOOR SHOWER); SHUTTERSTOCK (SATIN PILLOW); MALU AZIMA (EMERALD ROOM)