

February 28, 2014 6:29 pm

Silver gowns at the Oscars

By Melanie Abrams



Cate Blanchett in Antonio Berardi at the New York Film Critics Circle awards

Silver is not only experiencing a recent bounceback as a commodity, it is having a fashion moment too. The Hollywood A-list may have their sights on a golden statuette at the 86th Oscars tomorrow, but it's the silver gown that is likely to sweep the board when it comes to red carpet winners.

Silver has been hogging the spotlight since the Golden Globes kicked off the awards season with Naomi Watts in a clingy silver gown by Tom Ford. Cate Blanchett shone at the New York Film Critics Circle Awards in an Antonio Berardi silver dress with matching cropped jacket, and Taylor Swift won plaudits for her silver Gucci column at the Grammys.

Roland Mouret, who has dressed the likes of Sandra Bullock in metallic hues for the red carpet, says: "Cinema isn't called the silver screen for nothing – silver makes people dream and evokes a sense of wealth. The play of light and shadow on the metal gives a 3D quality to the body that also heightens visibility for Instagram and other social media."

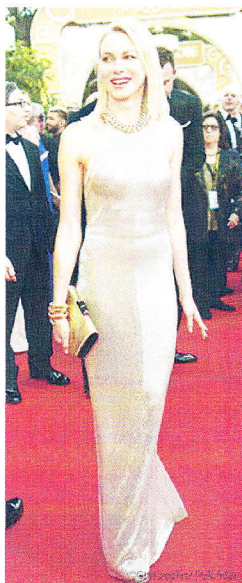
Roberta Benteler, founder of luxury online retailer Avenue 32, which sells diverse silver pieces, from a delicate Huishan Zhang lace off-the-shoulder dress (original price £1,455) to Lulu Guinness's silver Perspex lips clutch bag (£245), says: "There's a desire for femininity again, like the old Hollywood glamour of Grace Kelly," soon to be celebrated in *Grace of Monaco*, starring Nicole Kidman.

Recent fashion shows were packed with spotlight-grabbing silver. Giorgio Armani's January couture show was full of silver evening wear, with gowns and trouser suits in embroidered and bead-embellished pewter silk, looking like they had been gently lit by moonlight.

For spring/summer, Dior offered glittery strapless cocktail gowns with a futuristic take on the New Look; Proenza Schouler showed a pleated crêpe dress with metallic strips (£1,985); Vionnet served up an asymmetric silver maxi skirt; and Alber Elbaz created an asymmetric silver jumpsuit for Lanvin.

Apart from its impact on social media, silver also has a subtlety compared with gold. This has a certain resonance in our anti-bling days, according to shoe designer Paul Andrew, creator of elegant silver strappy slingbacks.

Natalie Kingham, head of fashion at Matchesfashion.com, says: "We're no longer all about dripping in diamonds so, while silver looks luxe, it is a lot more subtle, as well as stylish." The luxury online retailer has sold out of Joseph's silver metallic cotton knit sweater (£285) and is down to its last few Saint Laurent silver biker jackets (£3,215) after only one month online.



Naomi Watts in Tom Ford at the Golden Globes

New York jeweller Eddie Borgo, who sculpts silver into spiky architectural designs, including zigzag rings, triangular collars and hook-latch cuffs, says: "Women are becoming more open to experimentation, so those who might not have worn silver five years ago will do so today."

Away from the red carpet, perhaps the coolest way to wear silver is during the day. Katie Power, a corporate lawyer and part-time Pilates instructor, says: "My silvery jumper is something I throw on and wear everywhere. During the day it's not overdressed while, in the evening, it looks like I've made an effort. It's my way of being imaginative, because I don't wear prints or colour."

Natalia Barbieri, co-founder of footwear brand Bionda Castana, says the look should be kept simple: she wears her dark silver vintage leather jacket to board meetings with jeans and a T-shirt, or to parties over a slinky midi-length dress.

High street chain Whistles is selling foil pleated skirts, cropped trousers and strappy tops and a silver rucksack, all of which can be worn with casual pieces such as jumpers and flat shoes.

Baiba Grase, a travel consultant, advocates silver at work events. "Silver makes me stand out and feel more confident than usual, so I have conversations with people I wouldn't have met otherwise," she says.

So is it worth investing in silver? Ian Williams, chief executive of Charteris Treasury Portfolio Managers Limited, which recently changed its precious metals fund to 70 per cent silver, says: "Silver is going to do much better [than gold] because of its higher volatility in the bull market which we envisage. The mints can't make silver coins fast enough."

As to whether the same thinking applies to dresses, well this weekend's glittering red carpet line-up will provide some clues.