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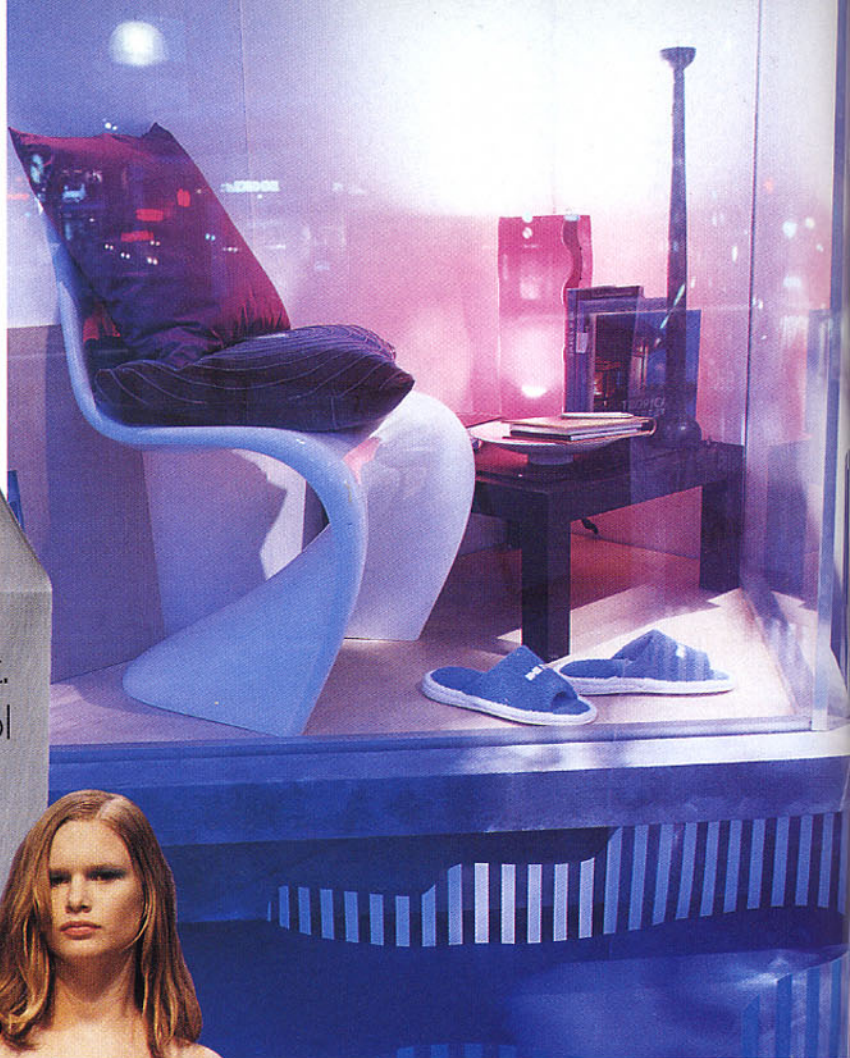


IN VOGUE

Tuning into the Zeitgeist is a lucrative art. Mark Holgate meets the experts of cool on the trail of what's hot

The next big thing

Beyond cool: Clockwise from right, Antonio Berardi's faded denim; Miami-bright cosmetic colours by Shu Uemura; Michael Anastassiades' mirrored stool; Laura Potter's silver carton; Mary Quant nail polish; Hush Puppies' lounge slippers on show at Selfridges



Monserrat Mukherjee is cool hunting. A buyer for Browns Focus, she's visiting young designer Susan Cianciolo at her studio in downtown New York. In a room lit only by failing daylight, Mukherjee is greeted by the designer's assistant, who tells her that Cianciolo will drop by shortly. She doesn't. An hour later and the room is in near darkness. The assistant casually mentions that there are no lights because "Susan's boyfriend took them a month ago and never brought them back". Mukherjee asks to see the collection anyway. She's handed a torch and shown into a pitch-black room, where she's left to peruse the clothes by torchlight.

Mukherjee passed on buying Cianciolo for Browns Focus, but this kind of experience is all in a day's work. "I've been everywhere to look at new designers," she says. "I've seen collections in loft spaces on the point of collapse, at fashion shows where there were 10 people in the audience, even sitting on a plane. It's crazy sometimes, but you can't leave a stone unturned in the search for something new."

She's not alone. There are countless others looking for the next big thing: the item, idea or influence that will be deemed hip enough to ignite the public's imagination and take off into the stratosphere. And it's not just fashion – an industry with a voracious appetite for novelty – that's hunting; the search is on in every sector where there's a choice of consumer products and services. If cool was once the province of a knowing, elite few, these days it's discussed at the corporate conference table. In the process, it's been uneasily coerced into the mainstream.

ANDREW LAMB; CAROLINE GAVAZZI; PAUL BOWDEN