

# BEYOND SOCKS

## Newest Argyles Are Valuable Retail Diamonds

The same week Justin Timberlake’s song about bringing sexy back could be heard blaring from speakers everywhere, the singer unveiled his new apparel collection, sporting canvas argyle slide-ons at the fashion show. Argyle... sexy?

Suddenly, this old-school, Old World pattern has become the “it” motif of the season. It’s on trucker hats, track jackets, the pockets and pant legs of denim jeans...not to mention, Justin’s sexy footwear. And, of course, it can be found on sweaters and socks—but most of these bring a whole new aesthetic to the design, like eye-popping colors, or argyles that are roughed-up and faded.

“I think argyle is a trend with legs because it’s so often found on socks,” jokes David Wolfe, creative director for The Doneger Group, before speaking in earnest. “It isn’t really a stand-alone trend. It’s part of the revived interest in everything classic and British like tweeds and glen plaids. The neat thing is that so many argyles are being spin doctored out of recognition. It’s been picked up by the hip hop crowd. And it’s not only being used in the traditional jacquard and knits, but also as an appliqué and in prints. Designers are expanding argyle beyond the traditional look or usage.”

Men are definitely taking notice, as 58% of men think today’s styles are anything but boring, according to Cotton Incorporated’s Lifestyle Monitor™.

At Boston-based Karmaloop.com, a nearly 8-year-old online boutique for men and women, argyle is the stuff of fun this season.

“I think it’s definitely a very tongue-in-cheek country club prep kind of thing, but with a street twist to it,” explains Karmaloop.com’s men’s buyer Jeremiah Myers from his New York office. “Designers are taking something traditional and very conservative, and putting a spin on it to make it streetwear. We have brands like Artful Dodger and 555 Soul who take argyle and add skulls, knives and daggers to give it that twist.”

Karmaloop has about a dozen items sporting argyle motifs for fall, with more coming in for spring, Myers track jacket from Artful Dodger, and a cotton/ merino blend Le Tigre V-neck sweater.

Blue Beetle, the men’s unit of the five-store Santa Barbara, CA, Blue Bee chain, is currently carrying a number of argyle items, notably tops from Fred Perry and Burning Torch.

“We have a T-shirt from Burning Torch that has argyle silk-screened on the front, and we’ve sold most of what we had,” says Jeremy Sypniewski, assistant manager. “We have a bigger offering from Fred Perry that’s pretty classic, and it’s gotten a good response. But the response to Burning Torch was stronger because it’s very different. The argyle on a Tshirt recontextualizes it.”

These shirts are bound to appeal to the 22% of men who prefer to attract attention with clothing rather than blend in with the crowd, according to the Monitor.

For them, Blue Beetle will offer funky argyle products into spring '07, like B. Son San Francisco T-shirts that feature very subtle argyle prints in purple and black, rendering a simple tee into something more akin to art.

Enyce has worked with argyle patterns in the past, but in a more typical application as part of a sweater design. This season, the company has eight items featuring the distinctive diamonds, including the “Well Kept”



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- Jeremiah Myers, Karmaloop.com

### CURRENT STYLES ARE BORING

Disagree	58%
Agree	34%

jean that features an embroidered design on the back pocket and front leg.

Enyce's design team says it liked the idea of twisting such an iconic pattern and experimenting with it, resulting in the mixed media interpretations that "felt very timely and directional."

Karmaloop.com's Myers says such advanced design direction is allowing argyle to cross over to a lot of people. "There's the more conservative kid looking to take a bit of a risk, and the fashion forward streetwear kid rockin' it with bright sneakers and continuing to push a look," he says.



Even classic labels like Nautica have updated and re-invented argyle in terms of color, style, fabrication and placement, according to Chris Heyn, president of Nautica men's sportswear and Nautica Jeans Co.

"Nautica has been integrating purple argyle into our dress blues, green argyle into our golf collection and chocolate argyle into our swimwear," Heyn says. "The pattern is now also pieced and printed in our non-traditional settings, on non-traditional silhouettes.

The company has about 10 argyle styles for fall and holiday, which could lead to strong Christmas sales, as the Monitor finds that 22% of men says apparel was their favorite gift last holiday season.

Nautica will continue the look into the first half of 2007 with lightweight cotton sweater vests, printed knits and swim trunks.

"The reaction has been great," Heyn says. "We see it growing in importance in non-traditional classifications: swim, T-shirts, knit active and hats."

Claiborne, as well, sees argyle as a growth area this season, something that will continue into spring, according to Karen Castellano, president. Men will find subtle argyle patterns, primarily tonal looks, on Claiborne's signature knits and lightweight sweaters.

"Since our argyle is done in a modern way— for example with new scale, more fashion versus classic colors and in more updated yarns—it's selling to a wide range of consumers; younger, hipper guys and older more neo-traditional guys, who are comfortable in a new twist on a tried-and-true pattern," Castellano reports.

Doneger's Wolfe says he expects to see argyle into spring.

"It has proven newness," he asserts. "It's safe but cutting edge at the same time."

*This story is one in a series of articles based on findings from Cotton Incorporated's Lifestyle Monitor™ tracking research. Each story will focus on a specific topic as it relates to the American men's wear consumer and his attitudes and behavior regarding clothing, appearance, fashion, fiber selection and many other timely, relevant subjects.*



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