

# THE VINSON VIEW

Quality maniac and master shopper Nick Vinson on the who, what, when, where and why



## VICUÑA WINTER WISH LIST...

**Alessandro Sartori's** chunky chevron crew-neck knit and zippered blouson, both in pure vicuña, for Berluti

**Loro Piana's** speckled sweater, knitted with three hand-selected natural shades of vicuña, and the brand's blanket, woven in vicuña and white baby cashmere

**Stefano Pilati's** double-breasted coat with integrated scarf in double-faced vicuña, for Ermenegildo Zegna Couture

**Kim Jones' double-faced vicuña blouson** and extreme vicuña single-breasted travel suit, for Louis Vuitton

**Brendan Mullane's** jet-blue super-light pure vicuña evening coat with a black mink collar, for Brioni

**Ermenegildo Zegna's** super-fine worsted vicuña cloth, made using long fibres. There's enough cloth to make just 25 bespoke suits

**Loro Piana's** 'blanc de blancs' cloth made using the white hair from select Argentinian vicuña. So far only zom of the special cloth has been produced

## 01 Ahead of the pack

Why a special woolly mammal has designers under its spell

If the fall/winter men's runways are anything to go by, it seems the chic chaps at some of my favourite men's labels – Kim Jones at Louis Vuitton, Brendan Mullane at Brioni, Stefano Pilati at Ermenegildo Zegna Couture and Alessandro Sartori at Berluti – all share my soft spot for seriously scarce and unbeatably soft vicuña.

Each year, around 8,000 kilos of vicuña flock, the raw material, is produced, leaving cashmere, at around 10 million kilos a year, looking rather common. Vicuña wool fibres are exceptionally fine – 12.5 microns (one micron is one-thousandth of a millimetre) – and one kilo of them produces 120km of yarn. Baby cashmere, the next best thing, is around 13.5 microns, good cashmere is 15.

The creatures themselves are found mainly in Peru, but also in Argentina and Bolivia, and require one hectare of pasture each (at around 4,000m up). One vicuña produces only 250g of flock every other year, and when the coarse bristle, impurities and oil are removed, you end up with less than half that weight, so six fleeces are needed to make a sweater, 35 to make a coat. The material is mega expensive – five to seven times as much as the best cashmere. At entry level you could get a pair of knitted gloves for around €950, a blanket could set you back €15,000 and a coat even more.

During the Inca empire, there were an estimated 2 million vicuñas living wild in

Peru; by the 1960s there were just 5,000; and in 1976 the Washington Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) declared the vicuña an endangered species and banned all trade. In 1994, Loro Piana joined forces with fellow Italian mills Lanificio Ermenegildo Zegna and Lanerie Agnona to create the International Vicuña Consortium, working with the Peruvian government and CITES, which agreed to relax restrictions and allow a legal trade in the precious fibres. No longer slaughtered but instead sheared biannually, vicuña numbers are up to around 185,000 in Peru, with an additional 40,000 in Argentina. The herds, living wild, provide valuable income for the local *campesinos* (farmers) come shearing time and an exceptional raw material for the Italians.

Although Loro Piana, Ermenegildo Zegna and Agnona are now luxury brands in their own right, they were all born as mills, producing high-quality yarns and cloth from noble fibres. They have been instrumental in nurturing and protecting the vicuña, for their own branded products and for cloth supplied to luxury labels and top tailors, such as Anderson & Sheppard.

Vicuña is prized by 'quality maniacs', according to Pier Luigi Loro Piana, the company's vice-president, whose father Franco began this chapter. Being a quality maniac myself, I think I can relate to that. ★

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## Fancy footwork

'Smart casual' is a pretty nasty-sounding phrase. However, Karl Lagerfeld's latest couture offering for Chanel included these beauties (above) with every look, and over at Dior, Raf Simons combined delicate floral beading with a white sports sole. Haute couture sneakers. Bonkers but brilliant. [www.chanel.com](http://www.chanel.com), [www.dior.com](http://www.dior.com)



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## Creature comforts

Catch the New York exhibition of designer Renate Müller's 'Therapeutic Toys', first developed in the 1960s in East Germany. All are produced using sturdy wood frames and wood-wool filling covered in natural jute and leather. Now highly collectable, they were a personal highlight from Design Miami. 18 March – 26 April, [www.r-and-company.com](http://www.r-and-company.com)