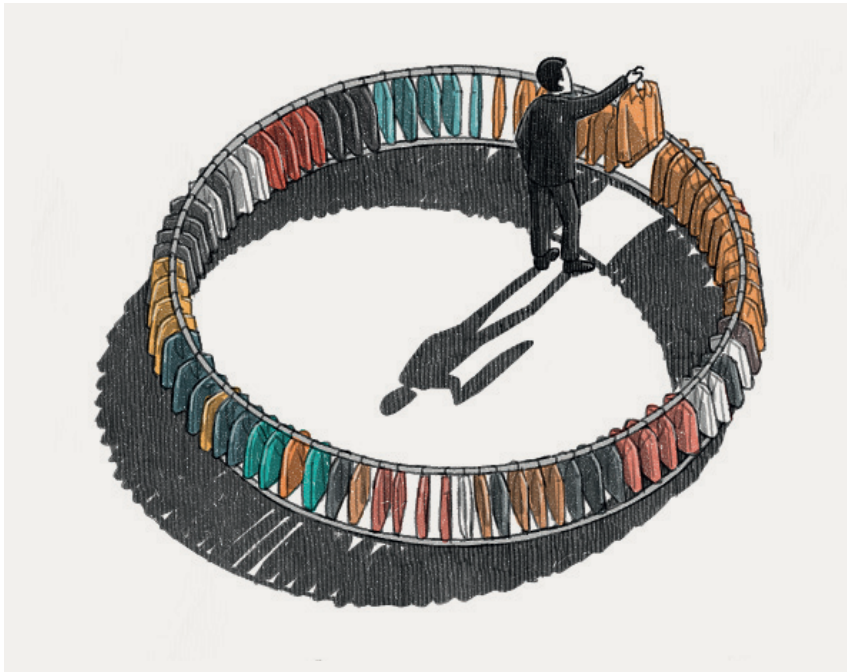


THE VINSON VIEW

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



NICK'S PICKS: BEST OF THE OUTLETS

Convivio, Milan

A biennial sale launched in 1992. All stock is donated, sold at 50 per cent off, and proceeds go to HIV/Aids charities. Next on in June 2016. www.conviviomilano.it

Dover Street Market 'Market Market', London

An occasional warehouse sale organised by Dover Street Market, with excess stock from the Comme des Garçons stable of brands, as well as some of the other labels stocked by the store. www.doverstreetmarket.com

The Mall, near Florence

Forty minutes outside Florence, The Mall has Balenciaga, Gucci, Bottega Veneta, Valentino, Fendi and more. The proximity to the factories might mean some good finds. www.themall.it

Bicester Village, near Oxford

Around 40 minutes by train from London's Marylebone, Bicester Village has some 130 boutiques. www.bicester-village.com

Hackney Fashion Hub, London

A handful of stores are already trading. When completed in 2016, new builds and converted railway arches by Adjaye Associates will be full of brands. www.hackneyfashionhub.co.uk

01 Bargain hunt

Let go of your prejudices against the outlet, but shop smart

Everyone likes a deal, me included, but I have very mixed views on outlets. Getting hold of top brands for a discount is such a contradiction, as part of the allure of luxury goods is their presentation and their high cost. So with my twisted, reverse logic, the more it costs, the more you want it. Louis Vuitton seldom offers a discount, and sales are typically offered only to LVMH staff. You will never find a Louis Vuitton outlet, nor Chanel or Hermès for that matter.

But something can be said for a proper hunt, and I have indulged at Desert Hills Premium Outlet just outside Palm Springs; Barberino Designer Outlet in Tuscany; FoxTown, across the Swiss border, not far from Milan; and The Mall, near Florence. The last was the best, totally packed, with standing room only on the coaches that lure tourists away from the city centre – no wonder all the multi-brand stores in the centre of Florence have closed down. I did buy a Loro Piana cashmere sweater in a surprisingly un-outlet shade of beige (at €350 it was not exactly a bargain, but I am happy enough with it).

Researching this column also took me to Bicester Village, a short train ride from London's Marylebone. I expected to loathe it, but instead was rather impressed. The offer was comprehensive and any car-free street is a bonus. Bicester is one of the most

profitable retail areas and its owner Value Retail has its marketing and visitor-friendly services down to a fine art, having made the location one of the UK's most popular tourist 'destinations'. Of course, like many outlets, Bicester is modelled on a 'village', which means Disney-style faux architecture, and the catering is a little bland – the biggest-ever Pret A Manger doesn't really do it for me.

London's Hackney Fashion Hub, currently under construction at Chatham Place, may change all that, with contemporary architecture by Adjaye Associates and rumours of a restaurant/café by chef Margot Henderson. Let's hope the new stores are a little more welcoming than the Burberry outlet already trading from the site. Security made me hand in my bag at the door in case I was a shoplifter; they certainly treated me better at Burberry in Bicester.

Today, no brand, especially those with shareholders and analysts to worry about, wants to hang on to stock, so outlets are the perfect way to sell it. But be warned, bargains are not always the deal they seem to be, as some brands also make products especially for the outlets, sometimes using remnants of cloth or ordering in lower-grade fabric.

So when you spot piles of polo shirts, blousons, loafers and sneakers or underwhelming handbags with visible branding, beware... *



02

Design Miami/Basel hits

My highlights included artist Sheila Hicks organising her audience by the colours they wore during her design talk. In terms of product, top of my wish list is Aldo Bakker's 'Console' (above) from Galerie Vivid.



03

Horn again

Visitors to Milan may be mourning the closure of G Lorenzi, the historical cutler in via Montenapoleone. Happily, Dunhill has taken the stock and will be selling it in its stores, in a 'totally respectful way', some time in the future. My supply of horn-handled utensils (above) is safe.