

# Infusion of fashion, blends, colours, it's an image makeover for knits

Knitwear has come of age moving ahead from being just casual wear it has now become everyday wear, even office wear. Growing demand has given a huge boost to innovations. Knitwear makers and brands are now experimenting like never before with fabrics, blends, colours, style and more

**A**s India's knitwear industry matures, innovations in style, fabrics, colours are driving growth. Trends are changing fast and so is demand. A variety of design styles in knitwear are on display on shop shelves every season. And as Saurabh Singh, Head Designer-menswear, Being Human explains, "Sportswear influence is still the biggest especially the '90s look, which is big on colour blocking and big branding. For spring, we have a rich colour palette of deep colours like raspberry, grape, beet red with highlights in fluorescent. For summer, we have soothing pastels and multiple tones of indigo from very deep ones to completely bleached ones."

## DEMAND DRIVING UP STYLE INNOVATIONS

Knits can create a visually appealing project quickly and easily, ranging from pullovers, vests, tees, and more. The silhouettes are familiar but what makes the designs current and fashionable are unique details, such as an innovative edging, a well placed band of color or texture, an unexpected yarn, or creative construction that minimises seams and maximises personal fit.

Talking about their brand's latest styles Rishabh Oswal, President, Monte Carlo says, "This season, we are offering polo T-shirts in striped, microprint, patchwork patterns, etc. In round neck tees, we have slogans, tropical prints, mélange of colours, washes, graphic tees to name a few. The colour palette this is divided into two: one, a strong, vivid palette that creates an effervescent outfit and the other, pastel hues for a subtle look."



- **Sportswear influence is still the biggest especially for the '90s look**
- **Comfortable knit shirts, crisp polos and plain round necks are trending the business casual look**
- **Value added fibres like Lycra, Tencel and Modal are in demand**
- **More ethical and eco products are being explored**
- **Slim, smart fit are the first choice in tees**
- **Mercerised T-shirts work mostly for premium formal wear brands**

T-shirts are increasingly becoming mainstream, as an all purpose all occasion product, points out Nivida Kohli, Design Manager, Numero Uno. "The trend has caught on with corporates shifting from restricted formal dressing to smart business casuals for everyday work. The T-shirt that was once meant for college goers or as weekend wear or indoor casuals has risen up to be the Friday dress code and now, has made space as everyday work wear with a

smart casual crisp look. Comfortable knit shirts, crisp polos and plain round necks are trending the business casual look."

Spending to dress up for recreational activity is also on the rise. This has led to new relaxed casual styling for street shoppers, cafe goers, college fests and holiday travelers. License and slogan T-shirts attract the youth to express their individuality from a fondness for marvel or DC comic characters

to music bands and trending slogans.

Active wear clothing with performance character and on and off the mat wearable is trending with increased consciousness about health and fitness. Denim love that never seems to fade away has rubbed onto knits as well with indigo and denim look and feel for the die-hard denim devotee. Look works best in head to toe denim attires. As Narinder Kaur, Design Head, Turtle puts it, "Polos definitely have a wider share in our brand. Mandarin collars in all its forms and styles are doing well. The colour palette for summer is soft and vibrant from lemon to peach, mint and aquas."

### SLIM FITS STILL SCORES HIGH

Fit is key to a good tee. The basic fit continues to dominate but there are lot of fashion fits making their way into menswear. For example, the baggy boxy fit with dropped shoulders, which can be in either cropped length or in long line version, long line fits are now coming in asymmetrical hemlines. According to Jain, customers are particular about well-fitted T-shirts, hence, they have incorporated a 'smart fit' range in Monte Carlo's collection where they are offering mid sizes (size 39) so that they don't end up buying T-shirts either too loose or too tight. For Kohli, comfort is key while making a buying decision while



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President, Monte Carlo

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Kaur feels silhouette, cut close to the body, as slim fit are some of the most popular that consumers are asking for.

### BRANDS' STYLE STATEMENTS

Most manufacturers feel while the largest selling item in their knitwear portfolio is their wide range of tees, it is the plain monochromatic variant that remains a safe choice. Indeed stripes, embroidery, mixed fabrics and appliqués are also popular as they lend individuality to a piece. Large manufacturers are now considering T-shirts to be works of art while other collections such as lounge wear and women's wear are now as good as it gets as far as diversity and



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innovation goes. Most brands try and keep a healthy ratio between fashion and basic knits as although fashion creates awareness and basic creates business, only a right balance creates a strong brand.

To lure customers, brands are coming up with innovative style statements. For instance, Being Human's style statement is: 'Look Good, Do Good'. "It is what differentiates us as we enable customers to look good and do good, at the same time. We are riding on casual luxury as the central theme this season. This is a mix of comfort and style in equal measures. All our clothes are pre-launched to achieve that soft handle. This season, we have introduced a special line of fashion vests which are perfect for summer/beach style," Singh informs.

Monte Carlo's Spring/Summer '18 collection is all about ultra-chic, suave and trendy pieces. The collection is in line with international fashion trends and is set to dominate the industry. The range features fresh and bold colours and unconventional silhouettes best suited for the playful mood

of new season. As Oswal explains, “We experimented with a vibrant colour palette for men, which others are still not sure to launch. For women, we have introduced dramatic silhouettes in tops, wherein a lot of ruffle play has been done, a huge range of cold shoulder tops are included.”

Divulging Numero Uno’s brand philosophy Kohli observes, “Our thoughts reach out to people who are not at odds with themselves. They don’t crave for a fake persona. What they see is what they get. One who doesn’t long for approvals and is comfortable in their own skin. The only person to really compete with is oneself. Experience the ‘Real You’ with us this season. We realised the need for crossover products and hybrid silhouettes to help be omnipresent as per ever changing lifestyle needs. Accordingly we curated the collections for this season.” Step in and out of work spaces in smart casuals. Smarten up or dress down in fashion casuals as per situational need. Classics are durable and trans-seasonal. Turtle on the other hand is offering a range of jacquards and a basket of engineered dobbies and a capsule collection of prints on two tone pique. The



**Nivida Kohli,**  
Design Manager,  
Numero Uno

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colour palette is pastel bright with ample beige, white and creams.

### FASHION VERSUS BASIC KNITS

There has been an on and off swing between fashion and basic knits, however brands have worked well by balancing both products to satiate every customers’ needs. As Singh elaborates, “The ratio of basics to fashion varies vis-à-vis brands/retailers based on their positioning and target customers. For us, the ratio is 20 per cent basics, 20 per cent mid fashion and 20 per cent high fashion/ directional styles. Since we are a fashion brand, we enjoy making new designs every season and to keep pace with constantly changing trends, it’s very important to be flexible.”

For Monte Carlo, the ratio between fashion

and basic is 30:70. Kohli points out, 30-40 per cent is core comprising of wardrobe essential classics with updated look that are trans-seasonal. “Demand for fashion and newness in fabrics and printing techniques is a big opportunity for this category to grow. The complexities that come with it have to be streamlined in this fast growing category to be able to cater to ever changing needs of consumer.”

Kaur says, today it is mostly about fashion. Basic is the core which is just 5-6 per cent of the total knit basket. This segment has become highly competitive in pricing. Also, channels through which it is available, makes a difference. Online has the largest platform and the variety being offered, price is definitely a decisive factor. Knit is almost becoming a parallel alternative to a shirt with



the kind of design and variety it has on offer.

Then there are options in neck styles which vary from 'V' and polos to crew neck and round neck, even boat neck for women. For Being Human, crew neck accounts for the majority of T-shirts as anyone from any age, style, size, etc, can easily wear it and it's



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available in maximum number of designs. Polo's comes in second, they work well for the smart casual look. Apart from them, there are other neck options like V-neck or scoop neck which in is a variation of round neck.

Monte Carlo has adopted all three styles however, in terms of demand while polo remains a preference for the uber-stylish and those who prefer smart casuals, round and crew neck is a choice for youngsters (college goers) who like laid back, easy dressing. Kaur says polo is more formal and is the first choice, if you want to dress for an occasion and a clear alternative to shirt. Round and crew are the same. They are preferred by the young and more relaxed purpose, so both have different pull factors.

### FANCY FABRIC BLENDS

In tees, the most commonly used fabric in basics are single jerseys either in 100 per cent cotton or blends. As Singh says, fashion styles can be 100 per cent cotton or different blends like Tencel, Modal or linen, etc. "Mercerised T-shirts work mostly for premium formal wear brands." Kohli states, "We are using cotton rich solids knits in varying GSMs from mid to heavy in our core basics. For casuals, we are using fabrics that give textured, marled, speckled look to the fabric along with a whole lot of prints with updated finishes on fabrics. For soul gratifying collection, we are using fabrics that represent the roots of our brand being truly denim." Indigo, deep blue and colours that allow experimental laundry processes are in. Borro prints and handcrafted techniques inspire mechanically made fabrics that result in fashionable durable and comfortable products. In the active wear segment its futuristic fabrics with performance

characteristics."

Jain adds for basic knits, jersey and pique are used while for fashion knits, interlocked and mercerised are used. Mercerised tees are preferred by the elite who want their clothing to be of premium quality. Kaur agrees and says, "Mercerised is more in polo. It's fine and superior. And definitely the higher price bracket. Fine dobbies and prints are being done on mercerized polos. Basic and fashion knit generally have a difference in yarns. Fancy yarn and finishes are the call of the day. Mélange, , indigo are the fancy bases, which differentiate from the regular core products. We also do surface ornamentations like print and washing."

### INNOVATIONS & BEYOND

In fabrics, surface textures have become important, double face fabrics are also in trend. Value addition fibres like Lycra, Tencel and Modal are in demand. "For us, about 40-50 per cent of our collection is with blended fabrics," says Singh. Monte Carlo is experimenting with knit structure, chemical treatments colour palette.

Meanwhile, with growing eco awareness, ethical and eco products are being explored to cater to the increasing need for protecting our environment. Active wear is innovatively and aggressively being explored by many to tap this category and wearable technology is touted as the future of knits. Kaur says apart from jacquards and indigos, value addition fabrics like Tencel, Modal as well as linen in knits is catching up. Special technical finishes are also coming in like anti-bacterial to name a few. With such growing expanse and innovative proposition in place, consumers will surely be spoilt for choice in future.