

Picnic at Hanging Rock keeps fashion in its thrall

The film has influenced the designs of Beth and Tessa Macgraw for their label Macgraw.

GLYNIS TRAILL-NASH THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM May 2, 2018

Is Miranda Australian fashion's favourite and most enigmatic muse? And no, despite her Aussie credentials, I'm not talking Kerr.

No, I mean Miranda as portrayed by Anne-Louise Lambert in the 1975 Australian film *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, the story of a group of schoolgirls who go missing on the monolith on Valentine's Day, 1900. And it's not just Australian designers who have fallen under her spell: this Miranda and the film have been cited by designers the world over as inspiration for their collections for decades.

Anne-Louise Lambert, Karen Robson, and Jane Vallis in the original *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

There is a mood on the world's catwalks that plays perfectly into this Victorian aesthetic, part of a larger movement towards more demure styles, one linked to the feminist movement globally. It has perfectly aligned with a reimagining of the story in the new Foxtel television series of the same name, launching on Sunday.

"Oh my god, of course," Beth Macgraw says of the film's influence over her and sister Tessa for their label Macgraw. "It's one of our favourite films. We actually have a picture from one of the scenes up on the wall. It's always in the back of our minds."

"There are many international and Australian designers referencing this film. You just have to look at the mood boards for a lot of the amazing international shows and you'll see Miranda up there in that beautiful white dress, which is amazing."

Susien Chong and Nic Briand have included those pictures on their mood boards in Sydney since the inception of their brand, Lover, in 2001. "We're doing a big brand document at the moment and there are still three images of that film in there," Briand tells Life.

"That scream of 'Miranda!' and the pan flute is never going to leave me."

The duo's signature lace and a sense of dark nostalgia mixed with modernity are perfectly aligned with the film's aesthetic and its moment in Australian cultural history, according to Briand. It also made an ideal point of reference for the global market when they started selling internationally.

"We needed a hook," he says. "We're not a surf brand or a beach brand, so being able to hook into *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was perfect. For us it felt so quintessentially Australian, and overseas everyone knew what it stood for."

"It's about lost innocence. There are the Victorian touches and outfits, piecrust collars and linens and lace trim, and on top of that it has this dark undertone."

That international perception was true for Irish-born, Canadian-reared Lee Mathews. Along with *My Brilliant Career*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* was one of her main points of reference before she arrived on our shores in 1982. The influence of the era still can be seen in her voluminous cotton voile pieces with pintucked detailing.

"Those seminal films are branded into your psyche," says Mathews. "There's no way of escaping them. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* has always been in the background of a substantial amount of what has come out of our workroom, and that whole Victorian thing has exploded (lately)."

Mathews puts the appeal of the aesthetic down to one word: pretty. "It's such a nice word, simple and honest, kind of underused. I think these pieces are just pretty and unpretentious. They're generally in cotton voile or something of that nature, so they have quite a nice honesty about them."

The easiest way to embrace the style is with a Victorian-style blouse, especially in cotton or lace, even as a trim, with the high neckline and full sleeves; it also might have embroidered detailing, broderie anglaise or pintucking.

Lily Sullivan as Miranda in the remake.

White is the predominant shade, especially for the *Picnic* aesthetic, but many may prefer something in a colour or floral print.

You'll find blouses in this style from a slew of additional brands including Aje (a-j-e.com.au), Topshop (topshop.com), Sir (sirthelabel.com), Hansen & Gretel (hansenandgretel.com), Zimmermann (zimmermannwear.com), Maje and Sandro (02 9327 3377), Matin (matinstudio.com), Alexa Chung, Frame, Saint Laurent, Needle & Thread (net-a-porter.com), Rodarte, Gucci, See By Chloe and Nili Lotan (matchesfashion.com).

And while you could wear a full look in this vein, designers recommend grounding these pieces with something more contemporary.

"It's about hard and soft, dark and light," says Briand. "Ultra-romantic mixed with something really modern, like a beaten-up pair of jeans. It's denim, it's leather. If you went at it full tilt with another romantic piece it comes across as too sweet."

Mathews concurs on the jeans, adding she would wear these pieces "as casually as possible".

"I'm a great believer in dressing everything down. Everything should be worn with Birkenstock sandals or thongs," she says, only half joking.

While Macgraw says their runway look is quite "buttoned up", she says, "in real life you can undo three buttons and wear it with a jean. It makes it completely modern. I love to see different types of women interpret it in different ways ... even my mum wearing a blouse with puff sleeves and rolling them up."

And will these designers be tuning into the new series? It's a unanimous yes.

"It'll be interesting to see how you can remake something that was so of its time," says Mathews. Briand hopes the pan pipe is in the soundtrack.

Macgraw has a personal interest in the series: good friend Yael Stone is in the cast: "She's one of the teachers, so she doesn't get all the pretty dresses."



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