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FASHION

# The mob wife look is trending. Is it sustainable?

Move over clean girls, mob wives are in. But the trend that centres fur coats raises questions about sustainability.

BY AMY FRANCOMBE

January 22, 2024





Photo: Getty Images

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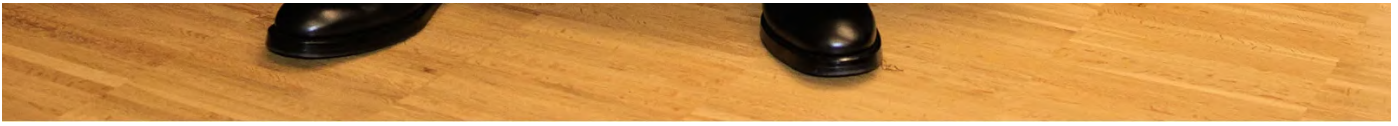
Consider it clean-girl correction: the mob wife aesthetic is the first fashion trend of 2024 to gain significant traction. Fur coats, animal print, big hair, red lips and chunky gold jewellery have replaced sleek minimalism, and on TikTok #mobwifeaesthetics has already garnered over 52 millions views in the past 10 days.

“Rather than dressing subdued and simple to emulate wealth, the trend opts for loud expression; glamorous bold dressing that is meant to stand out,” says Agus Panzoni, Depop’s trends spokesperson, referencing last year’s obsession with logoless designer basics and “old money” aesthetics. She adds that searches for faux fur coats are already up 18 per cent this month, while searches for leopard print are up a staggering 213 per cent.

“It began as any good TikTok trend does: one user dubbed ‘clean girl out, mob wife in’,” Panzoni continues, “And thus influencers and celebrities hopped on the trend sharing their take on mob wife dressing.” Dua Lipa was spotted leaving The Greenwich Hotel in New York in a lace catsuit and an oversized faux fur coat late last year. Kendall Jenner wore a floor-length Phoebe Philo brushed shearling (fur effect) coat in Aspen. Jennifer Lawrence arrived at the 2024 Golden Globes after-party wearing a printed fur-trimmed coat.

The runway is also a leading indicator. Pharrell Williams’s Louis Vuitton sophomore men’s show featured several fur or faux fur coats, as did DSquared2 and Dolce & Gabbana’s SS24 menswear collections. Meanwhile Chanel Metiers d'Art 2024 and Saint Laurent SS24 womenswear shows featured fur-lined, animal print coats.





Dolce & Gabbana AW24 men's. Photo: Acielle/Styledumonde

“We have been witnessing a backlash of ‘clean’ aesthetics, which paved the way for the comeback of ‘indie sleaze’ and maximalist, messy visual narratives in which the mob wife fits in,” says Marta Indeka, senior foresight analyst at strategic consultancy The Future Laboratory. “Like most TikTok-led ‘cores’ and aesthetics, the mob wife trend had no clear genesis, but is the result of movements and countermovements amplified by algorithms.”

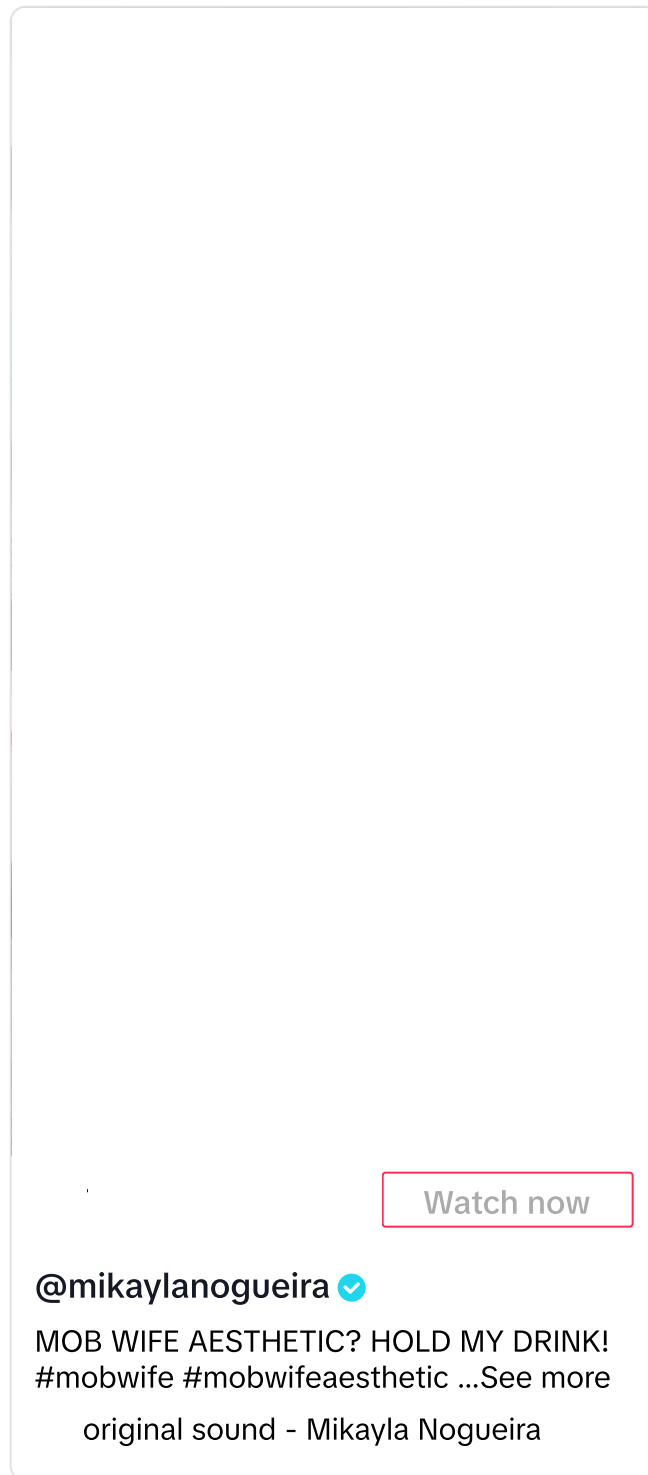
Molly Rooyakkers, the data analyst and market researcher behind Style Analytics, notes just how quickly the mob wife trend bubbled up to mainstream consciousness.

Rooyakkers attributes this to creators being acutely aware that hopping on a new aesthetic or trend early results in virality and high engagement. She also notes how controversial this trend is in potentially appropriating Italian-American and Buchona aesthetics, which has generated conversation in the comment sections of associated posts, further boosting engagement. And with fur at the centre of the trend, it’s raising renewed questions about the sustainability of both real and faux versions.

Rooyakkers warns that although people are embracing a bit more messiness in their fashion choices, it doesn’t mean that brands should shift their entire product lines to accommodate the mob wife look. She argues smaller changes in campaigns and marketing can be an effective way for brands to insert themselves into viral trends without losing authenticity or being too beholden to fast-changing cycles.

## Right place, right time

When a brand’s existing aesthetic aligns with a new trend, it has an opportunity to make the most of it. Luxury faux fur brand Maison Atia has seen an increase in influencers and stylists wanting to pull its bolder pieces since autumn — such as its Linda coat — which it attributes to the viral trend. “I think fashion is always going to be cyclical and younger generations will always be a little rebellious,” says Gustave Maisonrouge, co-founder of Maison Atia.



Whereas secondhand shopping platform Depop has a dedicated curation team that monitors the brands and items users are searching for, listing those most-frequently sourced and using them as a guide for what pieces are featured on their explore page.

“As the home of circular fashion, we tend to see a lot of cross-pollination of trends between Depop and other social media platforms. Our community will often search for inspiration on Depop and talk about it on TikTok — and the inverse is true, as well,” says

a Depop spokesperson, who adds that they have been boosting faux fur coats on the explore page in line with the trending mob wife aesthetic.

## The fur question

The fur coat is arguably the mob wife aesthetic's most-sought-after item, but the increasing demand poses important ethical and sustainable concerns. How brands respond will determine a lot about how those play out.

According to a [2023 report](#), commissioned by Humane Society International UK, the environmental impacts of mink, fox and raccoon dog fur production significantly exceeds those of all other materials used in fashion. Most notably, the carbon footprint of 1kg of mink fur was found to be 31 times higher than that of cotton, and the three furs combined were on average 100 times more water polluting than cotton.



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Real fur has, for many, gone out of fashion. Luxury brands including Gucci, Michael Kors, Jimmy Choo and Jean Paul Gaultier have phased real fur out of their collections, while retailers like Yoox Net-a-Porter and Selfridges have stopped selling it completely. The Fur Free Alliance found that between 2020 and 2023, mink fur production was down from 18 million pelts to 7.5 million, while fox fur was down from 1.2 million to 700,000 pelts. Board member Richard Bissett worries that the trending mob wife aesthetic could reinvigorate demand.

“Most major brands and high street retailers have ditched real fur and so many countries have banned fur farming. This is possible because consumers have overwhelmingly rejected the idea of real animal fur as being fashionable and acceptable,” he says. “Of course, people should enjoy the mob wife aesthetic if that is their thing, but please, for this and the next trend that comes along, say no to wearing real fur.” He notes that vintage fur — often upheld as a more sustainable option — perpetuates the idea that real fur is acceptable in fashion.

“Fur is one of the most polluting and wasteful industries in the fashion world,” says Claire Bass, senior campaigns and public affairs director at Humane Society. However, she is hopeful that “the increasing availability of innovative, next-gen materials”, such as plant-based alternatives, is a step towards a sustainable fur-free future.

Many of the current faux fur alternatives are made from petroleum-based products and polyester and acrylic mixes, which can take approximately 1,000 years to biodegrade once they inevitably end up in landfill. “Moving away from petroleum-based products while keeping intact our animal-free vision definitely is a huge challenge,” says Arnaud Brunois, the communication and sustainability manager of Ecopel, a faux fur artisan that works with brands like Stella McCartney. “The new generation of synthetics will have to be designed differently, free of virgin plastics to keep circularity in mind.”

“Ultimately the most sustainable thing you can do is buy timeless pieces that you can wear over multiple seasons,” says Maisonrouge. “Not just because it’s mob wife winter.”

Brands, similarly, should remain steady. Even in the face of rapidly moving trends. “If the mob wife persona aligns with your brand universe on some level, it’s an opportunity to tap into the trend and be a part of that conversation. But if it doesn’t, forcing it will feel

inauthentic and probably will hurt the brand's reputation more than anything," says Indeka. "It is key to keep in mind that there are so many narratives co-existing in the fashion landscape, a brand should not and cannot try to speak to every trend and 'core'."



If Sofia Richie Grainge was one of quiet luxury's main proponents, then the mob wife aesthetic takes cues from fictional larger-than-life characters such as Rosalyn Rosenfeld in *American Hustle*. Photo: Columbia Pictures/Courtesy Everett Collection, Michael Buckner/Getty Images



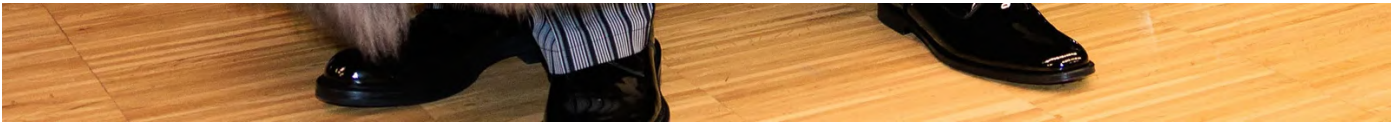


Chanel pre-fall 2024. Photo: Isidore Montag / Gorunway.com



Louis Vuitton AW24 men's. Photo: Victor Virgile and Stephane Cardinale/Getty Images





Dolce & Gabbana AW24 men's. Photo: Acielle/Styledumonde

Dolce & Gabbana SS24 women's. Photo: Acielle/Styledumonde

*Comments, questions or feedback? Email us at [feedback@voguebusiness.com](mailto:feedback@voguebusiness.com).*

*Correction: The Phoebe Philo coat that Kendall Jenner is referred to as wearing is a brushed shearling coat. A previous version of this story stated it was fur. This article has also been updated to reflect that Depop's 'faux' fur searches have risen 19 per cent this month, not just fur.*

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