

ASHISH
AW 2010

ASHISHISTAN

Welcome to the newly formed principality of Ashishistan, a former Soviet republic that is fondly known as the 'pearl of the Black Sea' - partly for the beauty of its women, but largely for the unexploited oil and gas reserves that are fast making it the Central Asian equivalent of Switzerland.

It's here you'll meet this season's heroine, who recently gave up winters spent huddled round a yak dung fire for lazy days in the Mediterranean sunshine with the Abramovitchs as neighbours.

And yet, as autumn approaches, her mind turns to home: the glistening peaks of the Tien Shan mountains and the harsh winds of the Kara Kum desert. Subconsciously, she reaches for an old wool dressing gown and throws it over a matte sequin sheath she wore to dinner earlier that evening on the Promenade des Anglais. She is going home.

Like countless traders before her, the allure of the Silk Road is irresistible, a dust stained, arid odyssey that reawakens her Central Asian roots. In Bukhara she commissions numerous gowns in traditional Uzbeki designs, drawing inspiration from Turkmen rugs and tapestries, with each geometric relief painstakingly executed in hand applied sequins.

As her journey continues eastwards the temperature drops, and she is grateful that she retained her old wardrobe before becoming an oligarch's daughter. Babushka handknits appear: a black and white cable cardie, a cream scallop shell pull, and her favourite grey v neck, with an irregular raised cable - if she closes her eyes she can almost hear the click of granny's needles.

But it's not just about combating the elements. As the first snowflakes fall, it's Ghengis-Khan-A-Go-Go, as she mixes her Kilim with full dirndl skirts and a little Russian nostalgia thrown in for good measure - from roses and teddy bear motifs on sequined pants, to striped pyjamas that have more than a nod to prisoner uniforms from the days of Stalin's gulags.

At last she's home. And somehow it doesn't matter that the family yurt has metamorphosed into a glass and steel extravaganza, or the Steppes where she rode wild horses are now an oil refinery. For here is the beating heart of Central Asia - where knits, silks and sequins are the currency of millennia - from Marco Polo to the modern day.

All stand for the national anthem of Ashishistan.