



The rugged look of many pieces of lightly finished leather is going to be one of the last words in fashionability, according to trends experts. CREDIT: WTP

Not 'perfect', but beautiful

Thanks to growing demand for authenticity, simplicity, naturalness and honesty, trends experts believe consumers are on the point of accepting that the rugged look of lightly finished leather is beautiful, 'imperfections' included.

For some time tanners have argued that buyers of finished leather are too fussy regarding blemishes in hides, often demanding a surface so free from scratches and other marks that, in some light, it will look like plastic. The manufacturers of synthetic materials, finding that their attempts to mimic leather could only take them so far, have somehow managed to convince brands that the best way to have a consistent look is to make leather mimic synthetics. This, at least, is what many leather industry commentators claim is happening. In response, they point out that leather comes from animals and that the more marks a hide has, the more natural the leather will look and the more distinctive it will be: it will bear the signs of a life lived like a hallmark. And in this age of

authenticity, the more natural a material is the more beautiful it will be in the eyes of consumers.

Convincing most brands about this has been a problem, with the buyers representing automotive and luxury leathergoods companies perhaps proving to be the most demanding, often insisting on as much uniformity, as much "perfection" as tanners can engineer into the raw material. The most obvious consequence of this is lower cutting yields from hides and more waste. Chemicals, water, energy and effort go into tanning a whole hide, but in some cases less than half the hide's area is deemed suitable for the buyer's use. Another alternative is to use so much finish to mask 'imperfections' that the naturalness of the leather is compromised.



Genuine article

Help in shifting this mentality may be on the way from, perhaps, an unlikely source: fashion analyst Chiara Fantig, a frequent presenter of leather trends predictions at Lineapelle and other events, most recently talking about the moods and movements that will shape leather demand for the autumn-winter 2017-2018 season. Among a wide range of trends ideas that Ms Fantig raises, she mentions that the idea of 'beautiful but not perfect' should be part of designers' and brands' thinking for the 2017-2018 season. She is now certain consumers are ready and willing to accept the idea that the natural, rugged look of many pieces of lightly finished leather is going to be one of the last words in fashionability by the end of next year. Wabi-sabi, a Japanese term that centres on the acceptance of passing time and of imperfection, will be one of the moods of the season, she says, referring to "chic poverty" as a trend that fashion brands will aim to tap into in bags, clothes and shoes.

Good news for tanners

She insists this is good news for tanners who want to emphasise the naturalness of their leathers and prefer not to mask all blemishes and natural marks on the hides they process. "There is talk everywhere of purity," Chiara Fantig says. "It's in food, it's in natural remedies. This is what the new generation of consumers wants. They want materials that are pure, but pragmatic, easy to wear. Product origin is very important, as is everything this means in terms of transparency and honesty. We are even seeing this on catwalks because it ties in with eco-fashion, and to make the point even more strongly, there are brands now turning up for catwalk presentations without any models, asking a few of their friends and even people off the street to show off the collections instead."

Clear proof

For Ms Fantig, the "most obvious proof" of consumers' acceptance of looks and materials that are beautiful but not perfect comes from the world of jeans. "Even very expensive jeans, the kind you see the most famous movie stars in the world wear, have tears and holes everywhere," she says. New York-based men's style magazine *GQ* ran an article in this March that went as far as to tell fashion-conscious men how many rips they



Denim with holes, scrapes and shreds is not just acceptable, it's desirable. The same can be true of leather.

CREDIT: DENIM PREMIÈRE VISION



Chiara Fantig giving a trends presentation at Lineapelle London.

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should aim to have on their jeans. Two-and-a-half is the ideal number, apparently, with a "scrape" (a small abrasion or scratch on the surface of the fabric) counting as a half a hole or "shred" (where the fabric has been torn but threads remain covering up the hole). "It's a look that's not only acceptable, it's desirable," Chiara Fantig says. "So why wouldn't it apply to leather too?"

Not that her anticipation is that luxury leathers goods bearing scrapes, shreds and holes will become as widespread as the designer jeans *GQ* was talking about. But she expects to see some confident, courageous, distinctive wabi-sabi-savvy consumers transfer the look from denim to leather for bags and other products. "There are plenty of people like this around," she insists. "I recently bought a pair of sneakers in Milan. They have leather uppers, but the leather is aged and blackened, deliberately. I love them, and I know I am not the only one because, as I was leaving the shop, customers who had been waiting to be served were pointing at the shoes I had just bought and asking for the same product." 🌐