

ratio variously called the “golden ratio” or the “golden section”. It is the number hidden in the curl of bracken fronds and snail shells, in the Parthenon and the concrete boxes of Le Corbusier.

The eye can't get enough of it, which is just as well because on an Aston it's everywhere you look. Follow a line the other way this time, from the tail over the roof to where the windscreen meets the bonnet: 1.6. Where the tail-light sits in relation to the top of the boot: 1.6. The size of the door in relation to the window: 1.6. One happy consequence is that an Aston Martin always looks as though it's getting away from itself – even when it's not moving. Ever since the DB2, which inaugurated the classic shape in 1950, the backs of the cars have been abrupt, so that all the momentum is going forward.

“One of the things that make a design last”, Reichman says, “is that proportion.” But it isn't merely the fact that features and forms have lasted that proves their longevity, but rather the way they've lasted. Like a cutler giving a simple, functional knife a twist, Reichman twists and torques the grille, the tail and the side-strake to renew them but not destroy them. The most extreme example is the recent One-77, where the side-strake looks as if it's been inflicted by Wolverine's giant claws, the grille gapes more aggressively than ever, and the bonnet has overhangs and gills. The result is X-Men-meets-Savile-Row, but put the car next to its forebears and the lineage is clear. “When I'm designing, I'm looking for something that is modern in its context, and that's very much about having a definitive set of criteria to design to. The challenge is to both keep and push the heritage.”

There was a time when all Aston did was push. In the late 1970s and 1980s, with a failing business and in search of new buyers, the company started designing with America in mind. It followed a fashion for muscle cars, and came up with new models that were angular, beastly and looked more like Mustangs. Nowadays these models show their age like shoulder-pads.

That was a sacrifice of elegance for ferocity, which in the cars before and since have been as balanced as Bond delivering his dapper punches. But, to tweak Le Corbusier's mantra, these are machines for driving, and when you look again at those lines running from nose to tail, and then picture someone in the cabin, you see that the pivot on which the design is balanced – the point of the golden section itself – is the driver. However good it looks on the outside, it's all done for the person sitting inside, the whole construction built around you as though you're the unmoved mover. It's design as flattery. And flattery, in this case, will get you everywhere. ■



Kassia St Clair *A Matter of Taste*

Backpacks are getting smaller and lower-slung. These are the best of the bunch

Backpacks are back – though as a practical way of carrying stuff they never really went away. As any chiropractor will tell you, the human spine can bear more weight than your arms, so it makes more sense to keep everyday loads centred on your back rather than suspended from one shoulder. (The pelvis can carry more weight still, which is why really large rucksacks fasten around the hips as well as the shoulders.)

This is lucky, since a new breed of smaller, sleeker women's backpacks – typically worn slung low between the shoulder blades – is being touted as a replacement for the handbag, by designers as grand as Karl Lagerfeld at Chanel and as sharp-nosed as Alexander Wang. It's a trend that has steadily gained ground for about three years, and it shows little sign of retreating.

This newer style of backpack carries quite a bit of fashion history between its straps. The two biggest influences both come from the 1990s: grunge, and the knowing, cheesy-preppy style epitomised by Alicia Silverstone in “Clueless”. But look closely, and you'll recognise traits from some more recent successes: sportswear-luxe, Jil Sander minimalism, and the louche, youthful, give-a-fuck attitude that Cara Delevingne, the British model with the eyebrows, has been peddling to major labels for the past five years. All this mixed heritage means there's pretty much a backpack to suit everyone.

The aesthetic case against them – that they're either too bulky, too schoolgirlish or too hipster – has been gradually worn down by more designed variants. At the less glossy end of the spectrum, there are a host of good-looking, practical, canvas-and-leather versions. The androgynous **Stig**, **Bob** and **Hege** styles from the Swedish bag-makers Sandqvist (sandqvist.net; from €119) have colour-contrast straps and a squarer, more structured shape than is traditional. This makes them feel particularly modern, as well as being handy for a laptop. State Bags in America have two contrasting but very successful styles: the **Mercer**, a pleasingly unadorned, rounded shape in waxed canvas with two bold brass zips, or the bucket-style **Smith**,

sporting a fold-over top fastened with a fireman clip (statebags.com; from \$110).

If you're looking for something to wear with a blazer to the office, the less fussy the detailing the better. The smartest (and most comfortable) styles will sit flat against your back, but can still be held like a handbag should you so choose. Whistles, the British brand with a keen eye for high-fashion trends that will make it into the mainstream, has been doing brisk trade with its backpacks, the best of which is the **Portland** (whistles.com; from £295). Made in either leather or shearling, in a range of city-friendly neutral colours, it's both breezy and cleanly designed, with just one, almost square, pocket. And because the leather shoulder-straps are the same width as the looped carry-handle, it's particularly attractive when viewed from behind – which is exactly when a backpack should look its best.

More streamlined still is the chic, black, almost briefcase-like **Caity** (*below*) by a young British designer, Danielle Foster (daniellefoster.co.uk; £470). Its shoulder-straps can be completely unclipped so you can swing it handbag-style, from the crook of your elbow. Just don't tell your chiropractor.

