

Gucci in spotlight

AS MILAN KICKS OFF IN UPBEAT MOOD



Celebrity-packed New York and quirky London have offered up their best efforts under the relentless glare of the catwalk lights and the world's media. Now it is time for the real heavyweights of Planet Fashion to put their stamp on what well-heeled women the world over will be wearing when the good weather comes around again next year. Milan's Spring/Summer 2016 shows kicked off yesterday in the most optimistic mood Italian industry insiders have known for years thanks to a backdrop of strong sales at home and abroad and a revamp of the city's fashion week infrastructure.

With a new headquarters and exhibition facilities amidst the skyscrapers of the new Porta Nuova business district, organizers are anticipating an upbeat week in a metropolis already enjoying the spinoffs from the buzz generated by Expo 2015, the food-themed world fair that still has another six weeks to run.

All eyes on Gucci

All eyes on the first of six packed days of shows were on Gucci, whose Alessandro Michele was set to unveil his second womenswear collection for the brand after making a flying start in the role he unexpectedly found himself in at the start of the year. The shaggy-haired Roman went from being an accessories designer known only to fashion insiders to one of the biggest jobs in the industry following the abrupt departure of his long-standing predecessor Frida Giannini.

Famously, he only had five days to finish off Giannini's final menswear collection and barely a month to put his first womenswear show together for the Winter Fall collections in February. He pulled it off in triumphant fashion with a collection that bore many of the hallmarks of his own, eccentric personal style—best described as a time travel tapestry in which English civil war royalist meets California dropout from the 1970s.

Gucci's bosses had said they wanted a new direction to turn around the brand's flagging fortunes, and they got it. Now the world waits to see if Michele can maintain the momentum with his new creations set to be unveiled from 1300 GMT. Also staging catwalk showed yesterday are top Italian brands Fay and Alberta Ferretti, Germany's Philipp Plein and the up-and-coming Italian-Haitian designer Stella Jean.

Among the most eagerly awaited shows later in the week will be Norwegian designer Peter Dundas's first since he left Emilio Pucci to return to Roberto Cavalli. The move followed a decision by the company's eponymous founder and owner to sell out to Italian private equity group Clessidra after 45 years at its helm. There are also new starts for Arthur Arbesser at Iceberg and Massimo Giorgetti, who has been tipped to go for a total makeover of the Pucci brand after replacing Dundas there. The Milan shows conclude on Monday, with Giorgio Armani's late morning presentation set to delay the departure of the fashion circus for Paris.

Daizy Shely, known for her arresting and ultra-feminine designs, is this season's beneficiary of Armani's support for young designers with the Israeli granted the use of the veteran's theatre for an eagerly awaited show on Saturday.

Booming sales

Italy's textile and clothing exports, dominated by the high value-added fashion sector, hit a record high in July and the national fashion body Camera della Moda is anticipating growth of 5.5 percent in all sales in 2015. For an industry that turned over 61.2 billion euros last year, that translates to a lot of secured jobs and significant margins for new investment. "Italian fashion has benefited from a stronger dollar and a return of confidence among European and American consumers," said Gaetano Marzotto, head of the textile group Marzotto.

"It is true that in China, luxury products, watches and jewelry in particular, have seen a fall in sales due to anti-corruption measures, but the accessible luxury that characterizes the made-in-Italy trademark have held up well." Giuseppe Angiolini, honorary chairman of the Italian chamber of fashion buyers, says his compatriots appear to be falling in love with fashion again. "More than a recovery, I'd say it is an awakening," he said. "Two years ago everyone was totally fed up with fashion. Now we are seeing customers' desire and interest is back." —AFP



Models wear creations for Gucci women's Spring-Summer 2016 collection, part of the Milan Fashion Week, unveiled in Milan, Italy yesterday. —AP

Five to watch at Milan fashion week

Five collections to watch out for during Milan fashion week, which started yesterday and runs till Monday with designers showcasing Spring/Summer 2016 womenswear:

Feather Daizy

Up-and-coming Israeli Daizy Shely has been given the Giorgio Armani seal of approval by being invited to present her eponymous collection in the Armani theatre as the latest young designer to benefit from the support of the dean of Italian fashion. Arresting and ultra-feminine is how critics define her style: a marabou feather coat is said to be among the items to be

shown on Saturday.

Garage style

Young Croatian designer Damir Doma unveils his first womenswear collection since quitting Paris for Milan on Sunday evening in an underground carpark known as Garage SanRemo. Doma made the move after complaining he felt squeezed by "superbrands" and their marketing machines. Milan will bring him greater visibility, he hopes, and easier access to northern Italy's specialist manufacturers.

All change at Cavalli

After 45 years at the helm of the eponymous company he built into a pillar of the Italian fashion scene, Roberto Cavalli has finally handed control to a private equity group who have brought Norwegian designer Peter Dundas, formerly of Pucci, in as the new creative head. Dundas's first womenswear collection in his second stint at Cavalli goes public on Saturday.

Winonah the Wag

The Surinam-born wife of Milan and Holland midfielder bruiser Nigel de Jong, Winonah de Jong makes the move from blogger and commentator to designer when she presents her first womenswear collection on Friday. Could she emulate

the success of fellow football WAG Victoria Beckham?

African quartet

Mimi Plange's African-inspired designs have been worn by Rihanna, Serena Williams and Michelle Obama. Laduma Ngxokolo's knitwear was first aimed at Xhosa tribesmen preparing for manhood initiation ceremonies but is now selling around the world. They are half of a quartet of African designers showcasing their work all week thanks to support from the Ethical Fashion Initiative and Milan's Biffi Boutique. —AFP