

RTW COLLECTIONS SPRING/SUMMER 2012

TREND OVERVIEW BY MARYLOU LUTHER

NEW YORK • LONDON • MILAN • PARIS

If fashion really is a barometer of the times, we're in for a colorful, spirited, happy-go-lucky spring/summer 2012.

Or: We're in denial mode.

By ignoring the economic downturn, the European monetary crisis, Arab revolutions, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes and technological overload, designers are either telling us to eat-drink-and-be-merry or to escape to the safety of The '20s, '30s, '40s, '50s, '60s and '70s.

In New York, London and Milan, dazzling colors predominated. In Paris, chalky pales and pastels, blush tones and 10 degrees of gray and cream looked fresh and less attention-crazed. White is the right of spring in all major fashion capitals, with fashion's black knight, Rick Owens, leading the new explorations of white nights.

Tangerine emerged as American designers' favorite color, according to a Pantone survey. Green is a go. And many designers registered a zest for lemon and a passion for red. Like the new fabric alliances, colors conjoined in unexpected combinations, as in Haider Ackermann's tie-silk mergers of magenta and violet, Mediterranean sea blue and chartreuse.

Prints leave their mark on everything from florals (star Isaac Mizrahi's hothouse peonies, Jason Wu's petals and Proenza Schouler's leaves) to surreal spectaculars (star Prabal Gurung) and tropicals (star the Hawaiian motifs at Altuzarra and Ferragamo). Gingham and paisley are reinvented by Raf Simons for Jil Sander. Birds wing it at Carolina Herrera, Reed Krakoff and Suno. Fusions get together at Mary Katrantzou, Diane von Furstenberg, Tory Burch, Preen, Zero + Maria Cornejo and Nicolas Ghesquière for Balenciaga. Seahorses and starfish rise from the sea at Versace. Scarf prints make a comeback at Pucci and Ferragamo. Photo prints look picture-perfect at Betsey Johnson, Dries Van Noten and Manish Arora, and art prints get fashion-framed at Rodarte (Van Gogh) and Chado Ralph Rucci (his own). Special recognition goes to Frida Giannini's "Hard Deco" graphics for Gucci—a veritable Chrysler Building of geometric prints and patterns splashed with sequins, beads and gilded fringe.

Designers everywhere seemed to want to ignore today's inglorious times by recalling the glory days of the past. The '20s and '30s recall the Jazz Age flappers with rouged knees and the geometric symbols of Art Deco. Dior's New Look of 1947 gets a playback with fitted jackets and fuller skirts. Cristobal Balenciaga's structured, away-from-the-body '50s is remembered by Ghesquière, whose probes of inner space (in his words, "Space between the body and the fabric") look as important as his long-time devotion to outer space. Looser, slouchier, body-friendly clothes also register at



RICK OWENS



ISAAC MIZRAHI



ROCHAS



3.1 PHILLIP LIM



PRADA



VALENTINO

Yeohlee, Rucci, Joanna Mastroianni, Marco Zanini for Rochas, Stella McCartney, Phoebe Philo for Céline, Christophe Lemaire for Hermès, Laura Biagiotti and Sander.

As luxury ready-to-wear edges into haute couture prices, so does the workmanship. Fine dressmaking details such as hand sewing, artful embroidering, precision beadwork, pleating and draping are especially apparent at Rucci, Sarah Burton for Alexander McQueen, Van Noten, Gurung, Aquilano Rimondi, Louis Vuitton, Rodarte, Bill Gaytten for Dior and Galliano, Rodolfo Paglialunga for Vionnet and Maria Grazia Chiuri and Pier Paolo Piccioli for Valentino. Special kudos to Ralph Lauren for his sensuous bias cuts.

Knife pleats, accordion pleats, box pleats, cartridge pleats, sunburst pleats, inverted pleats, Fortuny pleats. They're all part of the fashion fold and an integral part of couture touches. Standouts include Clare Waight Keller's leather-stripped pleats at Chloé and Sonia Rykiel's pleated coats in four colors.

From the smallest ruffle atop a pair of pants at Preen to the poufed exaggerations at Gareth Pugh, the peplum makes the hips hip again.

Vera Wang's peplum purview includes peplums on coats, jackets, corsets, vests, shorts and most inventive of all, a peplum belt. Thakoon, who started puffing the hips last season, once again proves that stuffing the hips is the stuff of fashion.

Fashion's new sports message begins with the Inuit. Anoraks and parkas score at Isabel Marant, Rag & Bone, Humberto Leon and Carol Lim for Kenzo and Theysken's Theory. The motorcycle jacket, track pants, sweats, warm-ups and utility jackets with mesh inserts also look like winners. And at Prada, car-toons, car coats, Cadillacs and Chevys rev up.

Fashion's sweet spot begins with lace: Alençon lace, Battenberg lace, Brussels lace, Chantilly lace, Venetian lace and lace's sisters, crochet and macramé. These airy, openwork fabrics are the networks that broadcast the news of delicacy and refinement. Leaders here are Valentino, Pucci, MiuMiu, Luisa Beccaria, Erdem, McQueen, Oscar de la Renta and Junya Watanabe.

Broderie Anglaise takes many new guises at Vuitton—from applied on organza to embroidered on plaid. Color blocking and fabric joinings such as intarsias and collages give fabrics new dimensions. Satin, organza and gleaming specchio silks light up the night. Hand-airbrushed latex ombres to the hem of a Gurung coat. Windows of plastic create grand openings at Pugh.

For his extraordinary experiments in the use of man-made fibers and fabrics including cellophane, silicone, silvered nylon, gingham-printed film and plastic-studded metal eyelet, we salute Marc Jacobs. And for knitwear artistry, Raf Simons' application of Pablo Picasso's artwork as knitted intarsia for Sander is a singular achievement—and one approved by Picasso heirs.

Machine-washable suedes, powdered crocodile, leather treated to look like washed denim, leather bonded to linen and stretch piqué—all are exceptional in Derek Lam's collection for Tod's. Powdered crocodile and whitewashed croc are big at Vuitton, eelskin snakes the runway at Proenza Schouler and python strikes at Michael Kors and Rucci.

The bra, created in 1907, had one of its biggest fashion outings for spring. The bra-vado began with upliftings at Betsey Johnson, Anna Sui, Ricci, Dolce & Gabbana, Aquilano Rimondi, Roland Mouret, Pucci and, of course, with the father of the bullet bra, Jean Paul Gaultier.



LANVIN



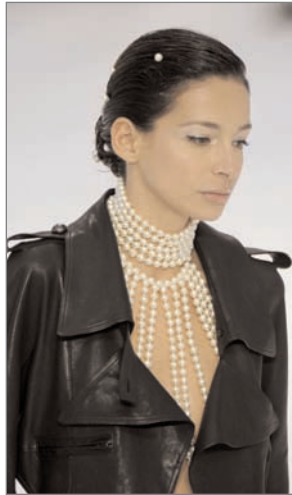
DEREK LAM



PAUL SMITH



THOM BROWNE



CHANEL



LOUIS VUITTON

Transparency looked newest when the sheer was layered over other fabrics instead of skin, as at Marios Schwab, Bottega Veneta, Vuitton and Christopher Kane. At Lanvin, Alber Elbaz filmed the party in long, full, see-through evening dresses.

Sander's Simons created the most compelling shirt tale of the season with white shirts, white dresses, jackets and coats—even a wedding dress. Doo-Ri's drape-skirted shirtdress, von Furstenberg's embroidered, sequin-printed long shirtdress and Thom Browne's awe-inspiring pleated shirtdresses were indeed special.

Enter The Little White Dress. It's headed for stardom at Donna Karan, Hussein Chalayan, Owens, Sander and Hermès.

Any length goes for skirts, with the fulls looking newer than the narrows.

Roomy jackets—all part of the move to inner space—rule at Yeohlee, United Bamboo, Giberson and Chalayan. The above-mentioned motorcycle jacket zooms and vrooms in many collections, notably at Altuzarra.

Lean pants, flares, wide-legs and palazzos all have a leg up on spring. So do pantsuits, pleat-front trousers and high-rises. Shorts—suited up at Carven, sweated at Chanel—look like tomorrow's mini.

Evening. Watch for long dresses with unexpected wraps: A sweater at Rachel Zoe, a leather jacket at Lyn Devon, a trench at Thakoon. For the red carpet, the winner is Don O'Neill's petal gown for Theia, made with gardens of laser-cut habutai silk petals, each secured to a tulle base with a glass bead that graduates in seven sizes from bodice to hem.

Lagerfeld's underwater wonderland for Chanel, sharks at Givenchy, scuba and surf at Alexander Wang and Ohne Titel, waves at McCartney and Peter Pilotto, starfish at Versace, sea nymphs at Armani and sea goddesses at McQueen—they all add up to a real sea change for fashion. A truly New Wave.

The shoe of the season is the wedge, followed by the pointy-toe pump, ankle bands and gleaming specchios. Loafers are the flats most likely to succeed. Sox appeal heightens at Jacobs, along with his mirror rubber cowboy boot.

White bags are white hot. Color is at hand. Color blocking is major. Mixed media is another message. And shoes that match the clothes they're worn with express the couture culture of the season.

Heads up for hats. And a special hats-off to Patricia Underwood, whose Jazz Age cloches for Lauren set new standards in this genre. Jacobs' 'do rags are also '20s-minded.

Pearls are sea-worthy at Chanel, where they appear in the hair as well as at the neck, and see-worthy at Browne, where one strand loops to the ankles. Vintage-inspired jewelry looks auction-worthy at Prada, de la Renta and Lauren. And for an heirloom worth chewing on, there's Dolce & Gabbana's farfalle necklace.



CÉLINE



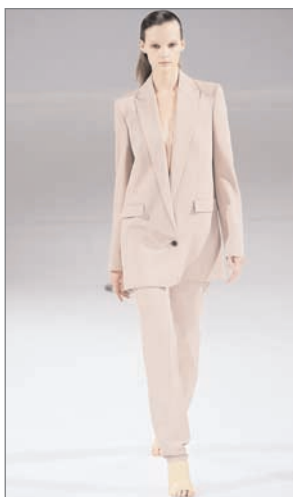
CHADO RALPH RUCCI



YEOHLEE



SHAMASK



HUSSEIN CHALAYAN



GUCCI

Bold, Brooke Shields-like brows, frame the face of spring. More refined high brows are also quietly present. The eyes have it, from midnight blue lids at Rodarte to Art Deco eyes with black lids at Gucci. Scarlet lips speak volumes at Jason Wu, effected first by outlining the lips with M.A.C. Redd pencil, then applying Scarlet Ibis lipstick with a dash of M.A.C.'s Pigment in Neo Orange on top.

High-voltage color electrifies the hair. Crayola shades star at Narciso Rodriguez and Thakoon. In keeping with the sea theme in clothes, waves of wet-looking hair come ashore at Alexander Wang, and sleek wet chignons shined at Chanel. Hair reached new heights at Fendi and von Furstenberg, where bouffants, beehives and chignons brought back memories of Kim Novak and The Big Tease. Could back-combing be coming back? Stay tuned.

We sign off with a big salute to the three most imaginative shows of the season: Thom Browne's provocative tableau vivant of The '20s, Paris style, Chanel's poetic gift from the sea and Vuitton's magical merry-go-round, telling us to go around merry.

BEST BETS:

Color: Brights, Whites, Chalky Pastels

Prints: Geos, Fusion, Florals, Photo Prints.

Pleats • Couture Touches • Sport • Ease • Lace • Full Skirts • The Wedge

The Loafer • The Smaller Day Bag • The Bag That Matches The Clothes

Vintage-Looking Jewelry, Pearls, Crosses.

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