

Miu Miu's focus for fall? Sex and suits



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Photographs by Christopher Moore/Karl Prouse

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egg white, not silk. And with the winged silhouette, the Lanvin collection took off on an intriguing time-travel journey.

"I wanted to go back home — after the moon, where do you go?" said Elbaz, who embraced futurism last season but in this powerful new collection showed himself to be a quiet revolutionary.

"Home" was the house of Lanvin in the 1930s. And looking at a pack of postcards printed from Jeanne Lanvin's archives, it was easy to see where the pure, unembellished silhouettes came from. Not so simple was how to achieve that sleek sensuality in a modern way.

The answer, Elbaz decided, was to work on darts, those form-fitting folds that were once an integral part of paper patterns. But, like the much-copied industrial zippers that Lanvin introduced, these darts were not hidden tracery, but visible folds. By the end of the show, they were even outlined with studs and sparkles, as though Elbaz wanted women to understand that these simple, geometric dresses were designed to create a womanly shape.

All this was much clearer in the program sketches than when predominantly black clothes walked a dark runway, with a scaffolding backdrop that

allowed the audience to see the models arriving and departing. Vivid pink and scarlet colors, although less wardrobe-friendly, conveyed a stronger message: comfort, ease and volume — all under control.

After the mountainous humps and lumps of fabrics throughout four weeks of the autumn/winter 2007 international season, Lanvin presented the new volume in a user-friendly way. The shift-with-shape dresses, a belted black jacket with narrow pants, a dress with a ripple of folds down the back, fur at the front or a flutter of collar were all comprehensible. The shoulders produced a fresh focus.

And if identical short black wigs seemed to efface the familiar models, Elbaz achieved something at Lanvin that the fashion world has been waiting for: a focus on the clothes.

Miuccia Prada may be prepping women for a return of — wait for it! — the power suit. After an outing at the eponymous label, shown in Milan, the Miu Miu collection worked suit shapes as partners and as separate pieces. The show, presented in the baroque surroundings of a Paris mansion, proved that this once whimsical line is fast growing up to take on big sister.

"Sex and suits? Why not!" Prada said when asked to define the focus of her show. The slick and seductive came together when the wide-cut, tailored, camel-colored suits that came out first were followed by versions in that gummy, matte, translucent plastic more

usually seen in sex shops. Not that there is anything new about Prada picking up ideas from the red-light district and making them look urban-modern. And Vivienne Westwood did that prim-and-sin look long before her.

But this time, fabrics were to the fore. The faux-provincial, double-breasted jackets with wide A-line skirts or even not-so-prim sweater sets came in shades of red and pink, often with bra or panties revealed like suggestive shadows. Other materials were leather that looked like bar-seat upholstery and quilting, to give volume. Occasionally the hips would be padded, creating a new version of the "New Look."

A frill at the back of the shoe and those inevitable schoolgirl socks also took a step towards the bordello. But the wonder of Prada is that she can make Miu Miu so slyly sexy, yet so influential. Working women are longing to get back into smart clothing. And when the models wore eyeglasses, carried an envelope bag under the arm and walked purposefully forward, you could imagine even these semi-sheer nylon clothes as office wear. All they would need is the return of the abandoned petticoat. Now there is another category in which Prada can expand the brand.

Elie Saab is not one of those designers who finds the working day sexy. And judging by the show he sent out, his women appear only at the cocktail hour in confections of fabrics that suggest a sultry world. This season, the sassy little black dresses took a modernist

turn, with vinyl bodices or brief shiny jackets. That futuristic fabric was set off against lace and Saab created some of his prettiest dresses with touches of that dainty material at neck or shoulders.

There was a 1980s vibe to the ballooning sleeves and giant bows, making the upper halves much more dramatic than below, where a pair of glitter hot pants is apparently enough for the disco world. With Hollywood stylists sitting front row, the more gracious long gowns in teal blue, purple and pine green looked calm and classy for the red carpet. But it looks as though the shop Saab will soon open in Paris will be an after-dark affair.

It is impressive that Igor Chapurin, based in Moscow, could catch so perfectly the vibe of the moment with his full-sleeved chubby furs, often offset with nylon, in an au courant mix of cityscape and sportswear. Even if such brief cover-ups will let legs freeze in a Rus-

sian winter, the fancy hose, in prints by the Russian artist Konstantin Khudyakov, were striking. And army caps caught the season's military vibe.

But Chapurin stirred a pot of influences and they did not ultimately meld. He quoted Aztecs and Mayans, whose enigmatic symbols appeared on jewelry. But what that had to do with ballooning sleeves was anyone's guess. The designer needs a sharper focus — perhaps studying themes nearer home — to offer more than good-looking, luxurious clothes.

Martin Grant has no pretensions to making anything other than nice stuff for his loyal followers to wear. And that is not such a bad idea when you inject just enough novelty to make a coat with a curve or a triangular pea coat look modern.

Plays on volume included a ball-of-fur blouson or a puffy silver blouse, both worn with wide mannish pants —

in a season when trousers are a rarity. Sculpted silver jewelry reflected the geometry of the silhouettes.

Volume at the back has been a story of the season and a purple satin trench that floated at the back was an apt symbol of the loosening up of next winter's fashion season.

A reminder of the counterculture of the brash, flash 1980s came with the revival of the Sybilla line. In her time, the artistic Spanish designer, along with Romeo Gigli, challenged the era of "greed is good" with poetic, gentle clothes. Those that were shown on the runway were nothing special, except for their fresh green colors.

But it is always good to remember that alongside major designers who mark a moment, there are others who deserve a note in fashion's history.

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A slide show of Paris Fashion Week



Top row, Burberry's patent leather gloves, long gloves meeting a black dress's short sleeves at Roberto Cavalli, and Missoni's fur gloves. Bottom, short gloves in coral pink by Sonia Rykiel; fur sleeves at Pollini by Rifat Ozbek, and biker gloves from K Karl Lagerfeld.

Taking up the gauntlet

By Maisie Wilhelm

PARIS
Colorful kid or sober suede, studded at the cuffs or squished up the arm, elbow length or longer — gloves will be back in the fall.

From Alberta Ferretti to Zac Posen, gloves — mostly leather and to the elbow — were a mainstay on the runways. Some designers experimented more than others, like at Maison Martin Margiela, where fluorescent pink leather sleeves stopped at the knuckles.

At Marni, the designer Consuelo Castiglioni's arm-length suede mittens stood out for their playful take on elegant armwear.

"After being forgotten for awhile,

gloves have come back," Castiglioni said, calling them "extremely elegant and functional." Some styles, like the padded nylon arm warmers with an elastic cuff at Marni, are fresh takes on the classic elegance often associated with gloves.

At John Galliano, charm and seduction, along with embroidery and beading up to the elbows, were woven into black lace gloves. Giorgio Armani sent models down the runway in black sparkly fishnet sleeves that were held up past the elbow, Moulin-Rouge-like, by garter belts. Another belted look was done at Costume National with buckles at the upper arms on gray angora gloves.

Riffs on volume were highlighted in the metallic gold leather at Moschino, where gloves ended with a flared cuff

well past the wrist. The knight-like quilted patent leather gloves at Burberry looked ready for combat, and Rifat Ozbek for Pollini designed luxurious puffy fur sleeves on leather gloves.

As for colors, the rainbow of hues on the runways included dove gray, coral, burnt sienna, chartreuse, violet and endless permutations of black.

While the runway appearances put gloves in a fashion category for next winter, sales figures already have been growing in recent years.

Mintel, a British market research organization, estimated that 2005 retail sales reached £46 million, or \$89.5 million. The segment has had steady growth in the last five years, from £41.1 million in 2000 — and another increase is expected when in the totals for 2006 are compiled.



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