

BREATHING ROOM

HIGH-FASHION STYLES EASE AS TEMPS RISE.



Calvin Klein Collection
White double-faced jersey and cadmium-striped tweed wrap vest, \$1,495; white double-faced cotton twill white cuff painter's pant, \$1,995; and white calf double-strap molded sneaker sandal, price upon request, calvinklein.com.

by MICHELE MEYER

Fashion cuts loose for spring. After years of body-conscious minis, leggings and hot pants—then last fall's misguided stab at boxy shoulders—designers are leaving breathing room via relaxed silhouettes and attitudes.

"We've embraced a more casual lifestyle that's all about ease and flexibility," says Colleen Sherin, Saks

Fifth Avenue's senior fashion director. "You look better when you feel comfortable."

She and other analysts credit home offices, active lifestyles and Hurricane Sandy, whose East Coast shutdown in late 2012 inspired garmento Marc Jacobs' pajamas-centric fall collections, which in turn sparked others. ▷

All images courtesy of the manufacturers.



Altuzarra
Aki gray long-sleeve jersey Henley bodysuit, price upon request, altuzarra.com; Obi metallic thread skirt, \$2,995, net-a-porter.com; and Gianvito Rossi for Altuzarra leather mules in shell, \$805, altuzarra.com.



Paul Andrew
Persica black-and-white sandal in Zebretta hair calf and soft calf, \$795, barneys.com.

EASY DOES IT

But a full-blown pajama party? No way. Strike a balance between billowing bottoms and narrow bodices or the reverse, says Sherin. Even caftans should taper.

Alas, like last year, going with the flow only takes you so far. This season's cream-of-the-crop tops, sports bras and bandeaux at Fendi, Gucci and Peter Som demand abs-olutely taunt tummies unless you show but a sliver.

Bare bellies usually mean dropping hems—but a compromise is bi-level, asymmetrical skirts. Thus, Carolina Herrera and Oscar de la Renta offer full-on mullets, while Chloe and Ralph Lauren hew to handkerchief hems. Lisa Perry's white mini sheaths trail trains.

"Pencil skirts seem too blunt and hard this season," says Peter Copping, designer at Nina Ricci, where alabaster cotton voile or chiffon skirts end unevenly. Like others, Copping skips linings, so even tweeds float. "I want charm," he notes.

Keep in mind that easy-does-it only to a point. Stringy, matted tresses and minimal makeup at Rag & Bone and Prabal Gurung won't cut it off-runway. You need to be otherwise immaculate to work Chanel's off-the-shoulder tweed suits, Céline's haphazardly knotted belts or unstructured handbags such as Lanvin's leather "paper" sacks and Burberry Prorsum's roll-ups.

As always, fashion's bipolar conflicts extend beyond silhouettes. The battle between sexes drives many a designer and season. This time, clothes makers riff on a gentleman staple: the crisp ivory shirt. "The best versions have interesting details, like higher hems in front," says Ken Downing, fashion director at Neiman Marcus.

DKNY feminizes oversized blouses by tying a second set of sleeves at the waist. Alberta Ferretti hikes romance and waistlines, then adds a rainbow of ribbons fluttering to mid-thigh. Even sexier are Donna Karan's solidly woven shirt-cum-dresses left open, with rolled up cuffs, raised collars and slit hems.

Now *that's* borrowing from the boys—and their bedrooms.



DKNY
Julep green nylon crop top for swim, \$84; julep green nylon classic bottom for swim, \$52; julep green color block pleat-front pants, \$335; light-blue square-top, zip-closed cross-body bag in Neoprene, \$135; and Laila-pointy-ankle-strap pump in black leather, \$225; dkny.com.



J. Mendel
Blush Graphic lace twist-drape long-sleeved dress with textured crepe skirt, \$2,800; Manolo Blahnik for J. Mendel pink mesh cut-out booties, \$895; and pale Melodie classic bag in pink/rocha/raspberry-gold, \$4,500; jmendel.com.



Milly
Black cropped polyester sweater with net sleeves, \$298; white slacks, price upon request; Riley clutch in white, \$295; and Manolo Blahnik black patent leather ankle-strap Chaos sandals, \$725, millynyc.com.

GOOD SPORTS

It's game on as sweatshirts, mesh jerseys, tees and track pants rock both men's and women's runways. They're sequels to fall's haute sweats, karate uniforms and Neoprene numbers at Givenchy, Calvin Klein and Stella McCartney.

"This trend is gaining momentum. Any woman who does not have a luxe sweatshirt is missing out," says Jeffrey Kalinsky, Nordstrom executive vice president, Designer Division. "For now, they're mostly crew-necked, but by fall I'd be surprised if they aren't hooded, zipped and leather-sleeved."

Sweats already claim an evening league of their own: Lacoste's lambskin and Viktor & Rolf's embellished satin. Even when nothing but net, Gucci's are laser-cut suede and Pucci's beaded tulle. Also unfit for locker rooms are Rag & Bone's plunging rugby sweaters, Balenciaga's woven leather twine running shorts and Marni's bejeweled visors.

No matter how sumptuous sportive is, leave some accessories on the sidelines (for the very young):

Lisa Perry's terry armbands, Pucci's boxer belts and even Prada's rugby socks. "Sporty works best when it's kept dressy," Kalinsky says. "Better to wear a fabulous stiletto with sweats to a party!"

That said, track stars have become a catwalk catch for men and women: fleet- and flat-footed pool slides, slip-on sneakers, oxfords, high-tops and Birkenstock styles. "Céline introduced Skater shoes a couple of years ago, and the whole market seems to have followed," says Kalinsky, who notes they're now mated with office and eveningwear for men and women. "They look right this season, giving outfits a little edge." (No more so than at Giles, where a frothy, feathery strapless strutted runways above white tennies.)

For women, the most covetable—and likely to be knocked-off—are Helmut Lang's pool slides, Marc by Marc Jacobs' gold snakeskin sneakers, Som's marble-printed leather lace-ups and Tory Burch's silver loafers. Also hits are men's Texas at Hermès and Givenchy. ▷

UNDER WRAPS

With rules broken, slips have slipped back into the outerwear arena, more strongly than since the '90s. Why has the boudoir bounced back? We can credit last year's punk moment, the pervasiveness of P.J.'s and sports bras and perhaps even Victoria Beckham's sultry negligée worn to Wimbledon.

Defying gravity with barely there straps are Max Mara's magenta, Ralph Rucci's ivory and DKNY's buttery silks. Handing out pink slips are Badgley Mischka, Lang (with a fuchsia sheer overlay) and Roberto Cavalli with ballet-slipper-hued beads. "Pink is the neutral of the season, whether it's pale pink against sand or even shocking pink," Downing says.

Most designers turn down the volume. Others, including Narciso Rodriguez, cut the sweetness with architectural minis, while some simply hint of pink: Tods with wrap belts and McCartney with cat-eye frames.

Burberry cloaks women in lace and organza in confectionary colors of baby blue, pistachio, lemonade and lavender that are as delicate—and delicious—as Ladurée macarons.

Stronger tastes may prefer Elie Saab's Pepto pants. Those thirsty for an even stronger punch may crush on orange—from coral to cantaloupe and tangerine to Tang—as do many designers. Among the juiciest and most wearable are Diane von Furstenberg's sandals or Fendi's mirrored sunglasses. Save the ripest renditions—Barbara Bui's pantsuit, Max Mara's skirt suit—for confident days.

In contrast, citrus puckers work well any time. (Not so Vionnet's traffic-cone colored eyelids, which merit caution.) Even if you believe orange is the new black, wait till Halloween to pair the two. Instead, your soundest investment may be bronze, gold, platinum and copper, as fashion has foiled once again.

But designers tone it down: Altuzarra by pairing cotton Henleys with silk charmeuse drawstring-waisted skirts, and Zero + Maria Conejo by loosely draping silver leather jumpsuits. They understand that today's gold standard is comfort—the ultimate luxury. ▽



DKNY
Pale yellow triacetate illusion slip dress, \$295, shopbop.com; and Jessica black/white high-top runway sneaker, \$115, dkny.com.



Top, left:
Ralph Rucci
Drop grain jersey dress, \$3,450; suspended black leather clutch, crystal gloves and black satin shoes with Plexiglass heels, all prices upon request at chadoralphrucci.com.

Below, left:
Badgley Mischka
Baby-doll tulle sequin gown in blush, \$4,930; and white gladiator leather Kimber sandals, \$255, badgleymischka.com.

Left:
Narciso Rodriguez
Rouge heavy silk georgette top, \$1,195; pink large-scale cloque jacquard skirt, \$895; and black shark pumps with leather heels, \$1,395; narcisorodriguez.com.



Hermès

Cotton pullover with buttoned collar \$1,175, with straight narrow trousers in cotton poplin and with drawstring waist, \$1,025; and calfskin sandals, \$670; hermes.com.



Costume National

Military-colored all-cotton jacket, \$1,190; matching pants, \$670; black cotton-jersey tee, \$310; black leather ankle boots with leather strap and metal buckle, \$890; and sunglasses in acetate and metal, not available for purchase, the rest at costumenational.com.

MEN'S ZEN

Guys also go soft this season, with roomy Rag & Bone cargo shorts and Missoni pleated trousers. And who needs blazers, button-downs, pocket scarves or neckties for office or evening? So much for fall's frippery! Today eases up with Hermès' linen tees, Gucci's leather bombers, Todd Snyder's cardigans and Burberry's shirts over shirts.

Even Ermenegildo Zegna and Bottega Veneta forsake ties. Belts go bye-bye, too, thanks to drawstring waists on Emporio Armani's silk P.J.'s and middle-masking tunics or elongated tees at Calvin Klein and Costume National.

But looser doesn't mean longer. Spring's slacks are cropped—with a caveat. If you're old enough to have taunted high-school nerds for wearing waders, consider yourself too old to pull off exposed ankles at DKNY, Hermès and many others.

What's driving this alternative to "gentleman" dressing? "Everyone wants to be a badass in some way, yet still a nice guy," theorizes designer Todd Snyder. "Don't take yourself seriously. Take one active element and mix with a tailored look, or vice versa. Wear a sweatshirt under a blazer, a button-down with sweatpants or a formal suit with sneakers." ♦