

SPRING FORECAST

A breath of fresh air hits the runways this season.

by MICHELE MEYER

Consider this spring a palette cleanser.

After seasons of clashing prints, frills and colors, designers have stripped away the clutter. "People are simplifying everything in their lives, and that's reflected in the spring collections," says Roseanne Morrison, fashion director at trade forecaster The Doneger Group. "Everything is simple and straightforward—the shapes, the necklines, the sleeves, the accessories and the graphics. There's a lot of monochromatic black and white, which is a relief for the eye."

Simply '60s? Not quite.

"Designers are pushing the envelope with new fabrics, neoprene, clear vinyl, rubber and coated surfaces that look like leather," she says.



Marc Jacobs
The Plastics Plexi clutch, calf
leather with nickel, \$1,350,
net-a-porter.com.

Black and White

Otherwise, fashion hews to a clean slate of hues: the solidity of ivory and jet. These shades that already ruled last fall at Alexander Wang and Ann Demeulemeester even have led multi-hue print mixers Missoni, Roberto Cavalli, Emilio Pucci and menswear's Costume National to snub color.

The '70's sexually charged black-and-white photos by Helmut Newton led Jason Wu to limit his range. Elsewhere, turbulent economics and elections may have contributed to spring's spare fare, theorizes Robert Tagliapietra, designer with Jeffrey Costello of Costello Tagliapietra. "Designers reflect culture, and maybe everyone's playing off our anxious world.

We're craving something that feels solid."

Thus, tough tuxes for tough times? Le Smoking seems to be the solution for evening, not only at Saint Laurent Paris, but also at Lanvin, Balmain and even Mulberry.

Not that designers are strait-jacketed. After all, Christian Dior's satin-lapelled vests serve as cocktail dresses, while bandeaus and white-piped trousers evoke chic tracksuits at Chloe and Narciso Rodriguez.

"Though we usually associate tuxedo dressing with holiday, you're going to see beading, striping and patterns going down legs for a while," Morrison says. ▶



Roland Mouret
Bendals jersey halter
top, \$1,141; Lomelo
stretch double
crepe pants, \$1,051;
Boehmes leather/
serpent chevron
shoes, \$1,980,
rolandmouret.com.

All images courtesy of the manufacturers



Balmain
Black-and-white striped
polymide/silk trench coat,
\$6,400; black denim cropped
jacket, \$2,500; white denim
sleeveless cropped top, \$1,200;
white denim skinny pants of
cotton and elastane, \$1,300;
black/white striped leather belt,
\$1,500; black patent calf leather
pumps, \$880, barneys.com and
bergdorfgoodman.com.



Stuart Weitzman
Attitude with walnut vecchio nappa
leather over black/white striped
leather wedge, \$425, available at
Stuart Weitzman stores.

Stripe It Rich

And how. Fashion almost uniformly walks the line with bold bands. While designers may have been inspired by Prada's striking strips of black-and-jade and cobalt-and-black last year, they spin a new tale—in black and white.

Everyone from Acne to Etro and Marc Jacobs to Michael Kors strikes up the band with verticals, no color required.

Already marching into fast-fashion masters Zara and Forever 21 are copies of the most covetable: Jacob's side-striped clutches, Balmain's trenches and Jonathan Saunders' holograph-striped crop tops. "Stripes are timeless, but the really bold ones felt new," says Tomoko Ogura, Barney's senior fashion director.

Still, no umpire's ruling is needed: Fat or skinny, up-and-down or left-to-right, the strength of stripes is unflagging.

Scaling down for men, Brioni and Canali stick to white-on-white cuffed striped slacks, and Diesel Black Gold to skinny-striped black/white vests. Even wide horizontal bands of charcoal and white, or copper and white at Dolce & Gabbana are work wear when grounded with traditional gray trousers. ▷



Dolce & Gabbana
Striped cotton
button-down shirt,
\$1,045; charcoal
cotton trousers,
\$595; cotton/silk
cap, \$295; calfskin
belt, \$245; calfskin
dress shoes, \$745,
select Dolce &
Gabbana boutiques,
dolcegabbana.com.



Michael Kors
Indigo Stretch Denim
Blazer and matching
slim pant; Deck Stripe
slim long-sleeve shirt;
yellow tie; leather
shoes; satchel,
prices upon request,
michaelkors.com.



Mod Squad

Harder to handle are Swinging '60's Mod Squad graphics. Louis Vuitton's Mary Quant-sized checks of white and black, brown, gray or grass declare "game on!" Diamonds and dots spice up baby-dolls and A-line minis at Miu Miu and Missoni.

Though runways maxed out on bouffants, British bobby hats and white gloves, "Don't go fully retro," warns Ogura. "A clean minimalist look is more modern. Make it your own with bright lips or nails."

Where Vuitton's Marc Jacobs and Miu Miu's Miuccia Prada go, others soon follow. So expect checkers to be the winning move well into 2013. Joining them by winter, we suspect: traditional tartans. ▷

Louis Vuitton

Left: Dark brown and white satin Damier crop top and mini skirt, price upon request; matching sequin/leather extra large Damier bag, \$5,200; dark brown leather pump, \$840.

Right: Dark brown and white satin Damier jumpsuit, \$ 3,234; dark brown satin headband, \$515; dark brown and white leather D'Orsay pump with bow detail, \$855; brown and white sequin and leather Damier bag, \$4,600; all louisvuitton.com.



Manolo Blahnik
Dodo patent leather stiletto sandal,
\$685, barneys.com.



Let It Shine

As at Vuitton, grass and sunshine perk up an otherwise plain—and plaid-pleasing—palette. Why those natural shades? “Green has a sense of clarity, a sparkle, and it grounds other colors,” says Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of Pantone Color Institute, which declares emerald spring’s “It” shade.

Indeed, for guys, 3.1 Phillip Lim’s kelly sweaters and Belstaff’s mustard moto jackets stand out in a sedate sea of white, black, navy and charcoal. For femmes, Naeem Khan’s daffodil chiffon caftans and Cavalli’s macaroon-mint lace flapper frocks are as refreshing as sorbet.



Chanel
Kelly Plexiglas clutch pochette,
\$9,900, available at Chanel stores.

Roberto Cavalli
Green lace dress, price upon request; green python sandals, \$1,755, available at Roberto Cavalli Boutiques.

Far East is Far Out

In another wind change, tight no longer feels right.

Expanding on last fall’s origami folds at Haider Ackermann and cocoon coats at Alberta Ferretti, fashion is breathing deeply in boxy tunics and slouchy silhouettes.

“It’ll take a long time for oversized styles to hit the mainstream, but they can be beautiful,” Morrison says. “Our orientation to the Far East may have started with yoga, meditation and martial arts, but Asia’s strong markets—and PSY’s Gangnam Style video—have taken the world by storm.”

Admittedly, some shapes challenge, such as Gucci’s plunging V caftans, Balmain’s Boy George shoulders and Prada’s deconstructed kimonos.

But let’s not forget the flattering cut of Stella McCartney’s kimono half-sleeves or the ease of Etro’s pajama pants for women, and Lim’s untucked shirts and Todd Snyder’s baggy Bermudas for men.

“Play with proportions,” Tagliapietra says. “If you wear something oversized, balance it with something tapered or short.” ▷



Fendi
Shift, \$1,990; printed lizard and neoprene pump, \$795; leather and PVC 2jours bag, \$2,810; headband and bracelet, unavailable/not for sale. Rest available at Fendi NYC.

Let There Be Light

You also can lighten fashion's load with the sheer genius of barely-there chiffons and organzas that suggest, rather than flaunt, slivers of flesh.

And you don't need fab abs to sport these looks. Waistlines rise above belly buttons at Rochas, Roland Mouret and Cushnie et Ochs. Cut-outs on Victoria Beckham's black blazers highlight midriffs yet reveal nothing, while transparent panels mute northern exposures at Chloe.

"Sheer overlays give you the effect of a crop top without exposing too much," notes Morrison. "The looks are feminine and functional. They can be worn year-round, which is necessary in unpredictable weather."

Some styles may disappear in a flash, including see-through trenches and capes by Pucci, Valentino and Burberry Prorsum, not this visible since the '70s.

The same will be true of show-all carryalls, even Burberry's purple doctors' bags and McCartney's amber clutches.

"Anyone who lives in an urban setting will be concerned with the security of their valuables," says Ellen Goldstein, an accessories design professor at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology. "You also can spend lots for something that scratches or chips within months."

Lucite may last, though, when it encases wrists or feet. After all, Chanel lit the lust for clear block heels last fall, perhaps leading to this year's sporty clear-soled platforms by McCartney and Valentino's studded yet ladylike PVC-trimmed kitten heels.

Ultimately, that's the essence of this season's styles: balance. ♦

Cacharel
Lace and silk muslin top; lace shorts; round sunglasses and shoes, all sold only in France, cacharel.fr.



CHARLOTTE RONSON



Charlotte Ronson
Sheath dress with sheer panels, \$295, shopbop.com; CFDA tote, \$198, available at Beyond 7; Erica tan synthetic platform sandal with 6-inch heel, \$40, justfab.com.



Stuart Weitzman
Theone magenta patent leather sandal with Lucite heel, \$398, available at Stuart Weitzman stores.