

REEL ROMANCE

FALL'S FINAL CUT IS PRIM, YET EDGY.



Alexander Wang
French knot mohair embroidered mohair/polymide plunging-back top in asphalt with sequin details, price upon request; asymmetric draped jogging pant in asphalt viscose, \$695; Marcellia asymmetric black kid suede pump, \$775; all at alexanderwang.com.

by MICHELE MEYER

Cue a rolling fog and an eerie Bernard Herrmann score. Enter a Hitchcock heroine—Grace Kelly, Tippi Hedren or Kim Novak. She's lovely, mysterious, haunting, seductive, but unattainable.

The '40s and '50s femme fatale is back and fully in control, thanks to a killer wardrobe. This season, reel romance spellbinds designers, lured by the duel between prim and provocative, with collarbone-caressing necklines in front that plunge in back, soft sweaters over structured pencil skirts and long gloves above sharp stilettos.

"These 'proper' clothes mask a smoldering sexuality, a dark side, hence the cool blonde has plenty of appeal—and edge," says Roseanne Morrison, fashion director at industry consultancy The Doneger Group.

Catwalks' latest catnip also serves as antidote to the anarchic (yet ironically pervasive) punk. And you can wear it to work, then don a cape for nighttime drama. ▷



Christian Dior
Dior bicolor wool and cashmere cable knit top, \$2,900, and matching skirt, \$1,750; velvet pointy pump, \$820, at Dior boutiques; Audacieuse sunglasses with metal front and injected propionate temple, \$500, at Dior and Solstice Sunglasses, dior.com.

All images courtesy of the companies.

The Great Caper

When cinematic romance calls, there's no better cover-up than a cape. Not only is it a great layering piece, but such toppers offer identities from swashbuckler to sleuth, from nurse to witch.

Each designer has a take. Among the seasons' stars are tailored, crisp versions of those shown on the spring couture runways of Valentino and Dior, and now by Beckham in tuxedo-satin trimmed black, and Naeem Khan in sheer gold lace over velvet.

Barbara Bui's sharp-shouldered coats with arm slits over black leather or shimmering gold pantsuits exude Balenciaga swagger. For ferociousness, think Donna Karan's gorgeous black leather-trimmed silk dresses with matching capes. In sweet contrast are Derek Lam's twisted ivory silk charmeuse capelets over matching T-shirts and ankle-grazing gowns.

Others are drama queens, including Zac Posen's oxblood cape over matching siren gown, Mary Katrantzou's evening pants trailing asymmetrical mullet trains and Ralph Lauren's showstopper shearling capelet with matching fur toque and opera gloves.

And there are cliffhangers. Would the nursing shortage end if hospital staffers were issued Mulberry uniforms of wine, pine and navy cropped leather tents over matching pleated minis and gloves? And what motivates Oscar de la Renta's so-out-of-character Red Riding Hood caper over black leather slacks? Perhaps sly fox and guest designer John Galliano?

For men, Dior Homme touts biker capes of goat hair, Thom Browne quilted boxes and Varvatos stylish Sherlock Holmes capes. But we're unconvinced whopper toppers for men will migrate from catwalk to sidewalk. ▷



Zac Posen

Chiffon drape-necked and caped gown of silk chiffon, \$4,990, barneys.com, (shoes, not visible) by Manolo Blahnik.



John Varvatos

High-collared asymmetric cape of wool and cashmere, with suede trim, \$2,198; over Austin fit notch-lapelled single-breasted three-piece suit of wool, \$1,995; plaid cotton dress shirt, \$245; silk striped tie, \$135; paisley border pocket square of cotton and silk, \$110; Fleetwood cap-toe boot of cordovan and velvet, \$798; Vintage creased bowler hat of felted rabbit, \$398; and leather briefcase with swag tassel, price upon request; all at johnvarvatos.com.



Donna Karan New York

Leather-trimmed black silk long-sleeve dress, \$1,195; leather-trimmed black silk cape, \$1,295; black hair calf ankle bootie, \$1,295; all donnakaran.com.

Dangerous Dames

The arch-femininity of Christian Dior's original New Look from 1947—wasp-waisted peplum “Bar” jackets over longer, fuller skirts—offered escape from fearful, austere wartime. With a swivel of hips or pursing of vermillion-stained lips, vamps from Lauren Bacall to Bette Davis reminded women and returning soldiers that the females who'd proven fortitude holding down fort and factory could continue to command.

Once again we're in rocky times, reeling from recession, terrorism and political unrest. And again we turn to Tinseltown for inspiration. The ensuing screen affair is a blockbuster, rising from last year's Victoria and Albert Museum “Hollywood Costume” exhibit, Scarlett Johansson's tour de force as Janet Leigh in “Hitchcock” and Sienna Miller's as Hedren in HBO's “The Girl.”

With shrewd timing, Dior appointed as head designer brilliant Belgian Raf Simons, lauded for dipping into Dior's archives in recent years. “All eyes are on Simons,” says Ken Downing, Neiman Marcus fashion director. “The postwar Dior sensibility is very important.”

Polished ensembles—coats and shoes matching skirts and sweaters or pocket-scarf garnished menswear—serve our desire for control. But that doesn't mean we want the same ol' thing, Downing says. Today's silhouette plays with proportion, fabric and styling, rather than clinging to history.

Thus, Simons renders bustle gowns in supple black leather. Nina Ricci creates a twist on classic crimson wool fitted suits by adding sleeves tied across the bodice, while Michael Kors modernizes the mink stole with a blown-up black/white houndstooth print. And Victoria Beckham slashes open what would otherwise be hobbling, below-knee pencil skirts. “No one wants to live like they're in the past,” Downing says. “Old Hollywood is done in a new way so clothes work for us, not against us.” ▷



Nina Ricci
Wool tie-front blazer,
\$2,490, and wool skirt,
\$1,325, sold at Ikram.com;
Graphic pumps, \$895, all at
ninaricci.com.



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Michael Kors

Dogtooth mink stole, \$17,995; raglan short-sleeve mock turtleneck sweater of cashmere, \$850; Shaker pencil skirt in cashmere, \$1,150; with Ingrid silver-toned metal goggles, \$195; Carrington top-handle leather satchel, \$1,195; and Ayah leather runway heels, \$695; available at select Michael Kors stores, michaelkors.com.



Victoria Beckham

Double cashmere soft T-shirt, \$2,850; wool felt wrap-tie skirt, \$1,395; sold at net-a-porter.com; suede patent Cruz booties by Manolo Blahnik for Victoria Beckham, \$1,084, manoloblahnik.com. Belt not available for purchase.

Opposites excite when accessorizing. So, wear elbow-length gloves, trailing silk scarves or dark cat-eye sunglasses with minimalist, sculptural garb. And update vintage silhouettes with '80s-inspired mid-calf booties and stone chokers, as does Céline.

Or make it messy. Thom Browne converts conservative to chaotic by paint-splattering oxfords, and Prada by letting dresses slip off one shoulder.

Leading men, too, should deviate from script when emulating Cary Grant's debonair charms. You

won't find heavy tweeds or high-waisted pleated trousers on Tom Ford-clad Justin Timberlake or in the collections of Gucci, Givenchy and John Varvatos.

"The return to elegance is more youthful," says menswear designer John Varvatos. "We're inspired by Old World tailoring, but realize men today feel stronger and sexier in clothes that fit close to the body and are made of lightweight, breathable fabrics." ▷

Charles Krypeell (jewelry)



John Varvatos
Slim-fit cutaway peacoat of wool, polyamide, alpaca and mohair, \$1,898; over adjustable-sleeve, slim-fit cotton shirt, \$228; wool/silk classic tie, \$135; slim-fit velvety cotton corduroy jeans, \$368; Parisian button boot of cordovan and calf, \$1,198; sheepskin gloves with suede and button detail, \$268; and oversized leather duffel, price upon request. All at johnvarvatos.com.



RALPH LAUREN COLLECTION
Deep purple silk velvet dress, \$3,298; with cashmere beret, \$398; amethyst drop earrings, \$3,500; black suede cage sandals, \$750; all at ralphlauren.com.

Lush Life

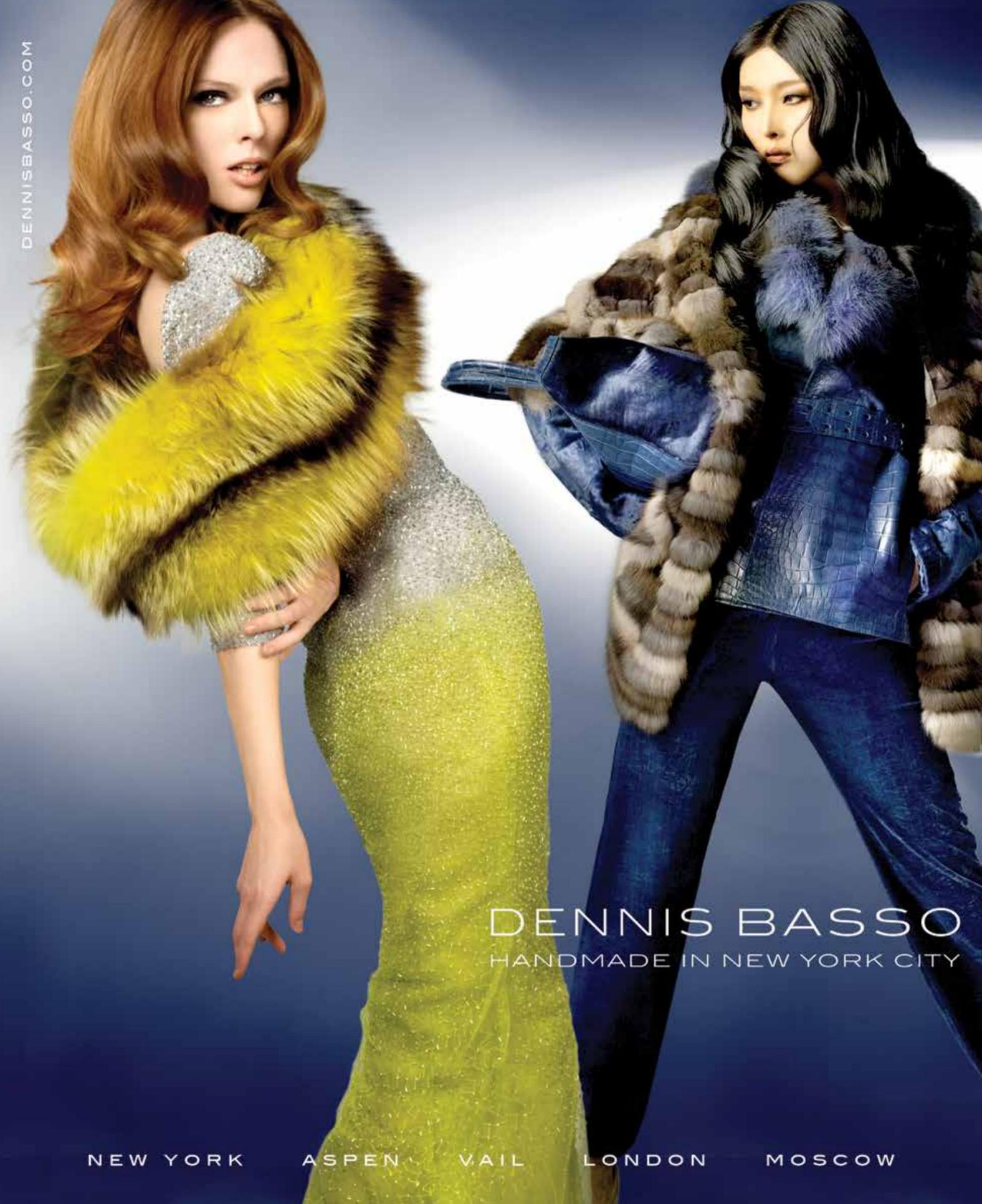
Another Tinseltown fave, the velvet revolution of 2012, continues to rule, with a twist. The frill is gone, along with any hints of last year's "Downton Abbey" dowagers, Giorgio Armani Victorian bloomers, Chanel patchwork or Gucci military officers.

Today's designers toy with plush that's leaner and lighter weight, as in Posen's *va-va-voom* navy body-hugging fishtail gown, Lauren's '20s burgundy velvet ankle-grazing slip and MaxMara's easy navy trousers with comfy sweaters.

A touch of lush can even be manly—more Sid

Vicious than Oscar Wilde. The palette is black, navy and blood, worn with a brood, but no paisley, ruffles or pocket scarf. Instead, Givenchy pairs skinny black velvet slacks with a zippered leather bomber. And Billy Reid and Diesel Black Gold's suits are no-nonsense narrow, to be topped with a duffel and grounded with a biker boot.

"If anything," says Downing, "today's menswear influences are more 'Abbey Road' than 'Downton Abbey.'" ♦



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