

THE FASHION GROUP FOUNDATION PRESENTS

RTW COLLECTIONS

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TREND OVERVIEW BY MARYLOU LUTHER

NEW YORK • LONDON • MILAN • PARIS

When the clothes for fall/winter 2008/2009 were designed, there were economic uncertainties. By the time the clothes were runway'd, uncertainties had turned to downturn and the "r" word was in the news. Talk centered on the mortgage crisis, foreclosures, business failures, stock market convulsions. Judging by the clothes they produced, designers have incredible prognostic powers.

As if they anticipated the mournful state of the economy, designers in all major fashion capitals chose the color of darkness as the number one color of the season. Black is now the official color of austerity chic. Fashion Noir.

Those same designers gave us escape clauses. You don't like the sound of tomorrow? Join Gucci's Frida Giannini and take a trip back to the rock 'n' roll '70s. Or re-cast your life as a '70s punk the way Viktor & Rolf did—with staples instead of safety pins. Or skip back to the early '60s with Dior's John Galliano and his boxy-jacketed suits of Jacqueline Kennedy memory. Or swing back to the '40s with Diane Von Furstenberg's homage to the Andrews Sisters. Or stop over in the minimalist '90s with Francisco Costa for Calvin Klein. Or revisit the grunge '90s with Alexander Wang.

You wanna stop the world and get off? Sign up with Jun Takahashi's Coneheads for Undercover. Or lift off with Nicolas Ghesquière's plastic sci-fi glamazons for Balenciaga. Wanna hide in protective custody? Junya Watanabe will keep you covered—head to toe. Wanna shield yourself from a takeover? Encase your body in soft—and not so soft—body armor the way Gareth Pugh suggests. Or put on Balenciaga's carapace of black vinyl.

Want more structure in your life? Start your reconstruction project with Yeohlee's pre-shaped coats and Rick Owens' leather pre-fab jackets. Wanna start cocooning? Enclose yourself in Marc Jacobs' scythe-back jackets. (That's what Pierre Cardin called his 1958 prototypes.) Wanna stay home under the covers? Get ready for bed with the new dressing gowns at Tuleh and Hermès. Wanna stay happy in somebody else's century? Check out Alexander McQueen's royal re-dos. Wanna start all over? Begin again with Hussein Chalayan's orbiting, LED-lit, crystal-bearing mechanical dresses for his fashion version of "The Big Bang." To their credit, designers are more referential than reverential in their fall remembrances of times past. Theirs are not faithful reproductions, but witty and/or cynical take-offs. Hello 2008.



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BALENCIAGA



CHADO RALPH RUCCI



DONNA KARAN



JIL SANDER



BOTTEGA VENETA



DRIES VAN NOTEN

ACCESSORIES. One reason fall evening dresses look believably new is the styling. Legwear is key. Black opaque hose bring a downtown edge to otherwise classic gowns at Valentino. Over-the-knee boots change Aphrodite into a club goddess at Alexander McQueen. Best bets here are colored opaque hose and/or leggings. Best of show: Proenza Schouler's colored opaques with contrasting color pumps. Holey hose are also something to snag at Rodarte and Alexander Wang. The fundamental ornamental for fall is the necklace. Prize winners: Philip Crangi's inventive statement necklaces for Vera Wang, Van Noten's necklace strung with bracelets and the resonating resins at Marni and Burberry Prorsum. In general, the stones are big and the craftsmanship stellar. Bracelets are the new arm candy. Marni's resin bracelets, Pucci's Lucites and Balenciaga's estate jewelry wannabes look covetable. The stiletto pump is the shoe of the season—in color as well as black patent, often platformed. The impressive boot lineup begins with the re-boot of the shoe-boot, then on to the bootie, aka the ankle boot, the knee-high and on up the leg to the over-the-knee. Heels range from flat to sky high. The most inventive footwear: Prada's convertible lace-up boots where the upper part of the knee-highs detach, leaving ankle booties.

The shoulder bag returns importantly, slung diagonally over the body at Gaultier for Gaultier and Gaultier for Hermès. For the first time in its illustrious history, Hermès worked with an outside designer, Yohji Yamamoto, to create a crocodile shoulder bag called, of course, "the Yohji." Handle bags, clutches and frame bags also abound. Belts from narrow to mid-size continue to put focus on the waist. Standouts include Pucci's belt made of crystal shards and the money belt at Fendi. Hats are cap-tivating. From the knitted grunge caps at Burberry Prorsum to the crusader helmets at Abaete, the fedorables at Cavalli and Michael Kors, and the jeweled cloches at de la Renta, hats are headline-worthy, especially Patricia Underwood's berets for Lauren and the feather concoctions by Albertus Swanepoel for Herrera and by Philip Treacy for Galliano and Lauren.

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RUFFIAN



MARNI



LANVIN



MONIQUE L'HUILLIER



VERA WANG



NINA RICCI

So what about the future tense of fashion? Is anyone sending probes into an earthbound tomorrow? Is there a new shape? A new sensibility? Kind of.

The one truly innovative side of fall fashion involves fabrics. These are designer-created fabrics as opposed to off-the-bolt yardage, and they bring a one-of-a-kind, couture sensibility to ready-to-wear. At Balenciaga, for example, the latex and plastic insertions have a kind of sci-fi/alien sensibility. Ghesquière's use of fabrics to mold the body, to give it a protective shell, looks directional. Sculpted, out-of-body shapes also look trend-worthy at Yves Saint Laurent, where fabric inventions include a cotton poplin bonded with mesh for a piqué effect that looks truly other-worldly.

Credit Miuccia Prada with re-inventing lace, bringing it from its 16th Century origins to become a show-and-tell material of modernism. Ralph Rucci propels the forward motion of fabrics by creating materials that vibrate. By draping a skirt on the bias, then pin-tucking it on the straight grain, a silk cocktail dress appears to move in waves.

Angel Chang's advanced technology fabrics include glow-in-the-dark, heat-sensitive prints that appear and disappear as body temperatures rise and fall. One of her heat-sensitive fabrics in a changing-time-zone print is used in a jacket with a hood that conceals speakers for undetectable iPod listening. Print meister Dries Van Noten debuts a material consisting of tiny pieces of floral-printed fabric that are cut to look like micro flowers, then hand-embroidered on chiffon. There are 40 colors in the prints.

Other noteworthy fabric inventions include Chanel's Matisse-inspired black patent motifs worked on vinyl and tulle, Burberry Prorsum's hand-painted gold feathers cut to resemble shingles and Thakoon's amazing plaid convergences. In a season where a lot of designers are mad for plaid, Isaac Mizrahi's plaid gown veiled with a hologram of leaves and flowers, Thakoon's multi-colored intarsias and Ruffian's plaid coat-jackets are significant.

The debut collections of Peter Som at Bill Blass, Esteban Cortazar at Emanuel Ungaro and Alessandra Facchinetti at Valentino were commendable starts in the process of renewing venerable houses. Each made pretty, wearable, artfully crafted, if not earthshakingly new, clothes. (Just as many well-established designers did.)

So what are the clothes and accessories most likely to make it from the runway to reality? Our ka-chings go to:

COLOR. Aside from black, purple reigns, followed by all the autumnal shades. Consuelo Castiglioni's unexpected color-combines for Marni are the most directional of the season. Also, the most artistic. Dollar bill green still has fashion currency.

PRINTS. Winter florals rule, especially those on black or dark grounds, as in the hothouse hotties at Dries Van Noten and Roberto Cavalli.



YEOHLEE



MARC JACOBS



RALPH LAUREN



YVES SAINT LAURENT



NARCISO RODRIGUEZ



OSCAR DE LA RENTA

THE COAT. No longer some outer throw-on that goes over everything, the coat is now a style statement in and of itself. Belted, princess-seamed, printed or sleeveless, knitted or leather, hefty, felted wool or shiny satin, the coat is preeminent. Yeohlee's charcoal felt cutaway cocoon and Ralph Lauren's purple wrap coat are exceptional.

THE JACKET. In addition to the structured jackets (notable at Narciso Rodriguez), the cutaway and/or swallowtail jacket looks fresh, especially Pilati's precision-cut tailleurs at YSL and the cocoon shapes at Marc Jacobs. The fitted peplum jacket is one to watch. The long, lean jacket is also a player and the boyfriend remains datable.

PANTS. They're wider in New York—perfectly proportioned at Oscar de la Renta—narrower in Europe. Exceptions: Jacobs' pantaloons for Vuitton and Pilati's easy cropped-at-the-ankle pants for YSL.

THE BLOUSE. In cotton, lace, chiffon, organza, silk prints and jeweled satins, the blouse, often with a bow-tied neckline, soars above skirts and looks newest with tailored pants.

THE DRESS. The sheath is the dress of record for fall. The templates here are by Raf Simons for Jil Sander, Costa for Calvin Klein, Tomas Maier for Bottega Veneta and Alber Elbaz for Lanvin.

THE SKIRT. There's a hemline for every pair of legs, every age, every price range, from the micro minis at Balmain to the ankle lengths at Chanel. The knee-hovering pencil skirt looked "write" to retailers.

KNITS. Text-ure message: btw...bold, chunky knits r4u. The knitted coat looks like a winner, especially at Donna Karan, Julien Macdonald, Celine and Zero Maria Cornejo. Best sweaters: Tom Scott, Sonia Rykiel, Fendi, Malandrino, Doo.Ri and Lauren, where ski intarsias score.

EVENING. Cocktail lengths outnumber full-blown gowns with one-shoulder versions the number one neckline. Number one here: Elbaz's blue-ribbon-worthy, ribboned bands for Lanvin. The evening dress that most perfectly defines the season is Vera Wang's embroidered chiffon tank over a hammered gold slip. Discretion for the recession.

EMBELLISHMENT. The most novel decorative element of the season involves office equipment. Like the safety pins of punk, staples offer extraordinary applications of the ordinary at Viktor & Rolf. Sequins are once again supreme. Noteworthy here are Proenza Schouler's sequin-paneled coats, Derek Lam's bronze hologram of antique sequins and Richard Chai's triple-play strip-away consisting of a pailletted silk organza mini over a crinkled chiffon shirt dress over a drape-neck jersey dress. Many designers flock to feathers. In addition to the real thing, Way Zen's simulated feathers hand-made of silk for JSong and Christopher Bailey's organza feathers for Burberry Prorsum are truly outstanding.

FUR. From savage at Jean Paul Gaultier to Vampira at Pugh and super-chic in sable-on-tulle at Rucci, fall furs have extraordinary range. Notable at Michael Kors' are fur scarves and shrugs as well as jackets and coats. The fur vest looks like a best bet, usually rendered in long hairs like fox or goat. The most memorable furs: Mizrahi's knitted Fair Isle-patterned mink sweater and his "rag fur" consisting of 20 different species.