



Can Dior Be Cool?

All eyes were on Jonathan Anderson's debut collection for the house. Also: Willy Chavarria, Rick Owens, and more.

By Cathy Horyn



I want Dior to be the pinnacle," Jonathan Anderson said before his first collection for the house, a men's show staged for a relatively small audience, about 600 people, in one of those imposing box-shaped tents. We were all seated on wooden blocks in a gray-washed room, Dior gray, that resembled a museum gallery; on the walls were two paintings by the 18th-century artist Jean Siméon Chardin, on loan from the Louvre and the National Galleries of Scotland, thanks to the clout of LVMH. By "we," I mean Daniel Craig, Sabrina Carpenter, Josh O'Connor, Robert Pattinson, Roger Federer, Rihanna, and A\$AP Rocky; the designers Donatella Versace, Pierpaolo Piccioli, and Silvia Venturini Fendi; and the photographers Juergen Teller and David Sims. "I wouldn't miss this," said the English stylist Amanda Harlech, who may have been the chicest woman in the room in her plain summer frock and a babushka that looked like vintage Hermès silk. "I've just come from Shropshire," she said, referring to her home. Harlech was one of Anderson's earliest supporters.

But hasn't Dior always been at the pinnacle of style and quality? Through all the designers who have led the brand since the death of Christian Dior in 1957, from Yves Saint Laurent and Marc Bohan to John Galliano, Raf Simons, and Hedi Slimane, who reinvented Dior Homme with his skinny black suits and rock-infused dandyism? Its most recent creative directors, Maria Grazia Chiuri and Kim Jones, didn't do so badly, either. But Anderson is correct that "something got lost" in the years since the pandemic, a kind of creative urgency. Dior may be a multibillion-dollar machine, but for that very reason it can afford to take more risks with its fashion and its imagery, be relevant. Anderson, who made a success of Loewe, is now in the unique position of being in charge of both the men's and women's design at Dior. None of his predecessors had that kind of power.

It is an enormous test of his ambition and talent. So how did the Irish-born Anderson, who once set out to be an actor before he started his own JW Anderson label in London, fare on Saturday? I sensed that many spectators were admiring but not overwhelmed by his proposal, in essence, of an aristocrat meeting an up-and-comer, an idea expressed in the opening look: a dark-green Bar jacket in Donegal tweed worn with a gentleman's white stock tie (from the 18th century, more or less) and baggy off-white cargo shorts with side draping based on a 1948 Dior gown known as Delft. Fifteen meters of cotton went into the shorts. Anderson said that all the fabrics in the collection were developed from





swatches from Dior's first two collections. On his mood board and Instagram were Warhol's images of the socialite Lee Radziwill and the painter Jean-Michel Basquiat. Warhol's sense of the new and fame has already served many designers.

I am reminded, too, that designers of legacy houses often start out quite nostalgic and referential. Demna's first collection for Balenciaga looked at the way models in the '50s posed for photographers, and he literally built that posture into his clothes. It took Demna almost four years, from 2015, to really find his style at Balenciaga, and the turning point, in my mind, was his spring 2020 collection, the so-called "power dressing" show staged in a room that looked like a government chamber. His influence became clearer still with his first couture show in July 2021.

Anderson's approach to Dior is not dissimilar. He told me, "Everyone has added a chapter to the history of Dior." He wanted to learn more about the founder: "Who was this person, and why did he make all these decisions?" Dior was interested in the 18th century and the way it had remained alive in French culture, especially in the postwar. "He got to the 'New Look' by looking back," said Anderson, referring to the 1947 collection. Dior was also an Anglophile — hence the tweeds and stocks.

There are many good things in this collection, notably the waistcoats, capes, a fuzzy yarn bag (a collaboration with the artist Sheila Hicks), and the broken-down sneakers, which seemed at once a nod to an early Slimane look and to American slob style among elites. It was quite odd, or funny, to see some of the male celebrities wearing a rep tie askew on their shirt collar, after Basquiat in his 1982 portrait, and the models. All I can say about that is: Don't — just don't.

Yet, unlike most of his Dior predecessors, Anderson didn't make a sharp statement out of the gate, as Slimane did with his skinny black suits and Simons with his modern minimalism and romance against a lush backdrop of flowers. Even Chiuri marked a difference with her feminist-slogan T-shirts. "It's just the beginning," Anderson told me. True, but hopefully a clearer sense of edge — what's happening today — will emerge in his first women's collection this fall. And with a brand like Dior, which sells a lot of clothes and accessories, Anderson must also create a universe that people will want to enter. To put it in blunt fashion terms, can Dior be cool?

Perhaps because I am an irregular visitor in the world of men's clothing, I've been struck by the novelty and freshness of many of the collections in Milan and Paris. Watching the Prada show last Sunday, with its plain, slim khaki raincoats with red track pants and driving moccasins, I thought of the style of the editor Carlyne Cerf de Dudzele, though she'd wear the coat with the sleeves pushed up and all her jewelry. Still, the look seemed right to me. Prada also had the nostalgia (or so I thought) of summer places in the 1960s, yet to the credit of Miuccia Prada and Simons, the references were not direct. They were far away. You could see what you wanted to see, and I like that possibility in a show.

Among the outstanding Paris shows were Rick Owens, for stripping back his aesthetic to a raw sexuality and, in a way, liberating it from the gloom; the young designer Kiko Kostadinov, born in Bulgaria and based in London, whose press notes identified all his well-chosen fabrics and whose relaxed silhouettes, especially tops and bottoms based on military pajamas, and an off-white cotton jumpsuit spliced with kimono silk, felt realistic; and Hermès, where Véronique Nichanian responded to the shifts in dressing (and climate change) by largely ignoring tailored suits and focusing instead on trim windbreakers in subtly perforated leather, with wide, mostly cotton trousers. I also loved Nichanian's elevated T-shirts in silk for summer evenings. The room may have been sweltering — like most of the Paris shows — but the Hermès man kept his crispness.

Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons and Junya Watanabe made quite a counterstatement with tailoring. Kawakubo called her collection "Not Suits But Suits," and it was a lively riff on power dressing, with pinstripes and her adept take on historical modes. She said afterward, in one of her verbal puzzles, that she was thinking of the political leader the world needs at the moment but who probably isn't coming.





Watanabe's collection, especially the first 15 or so looks, was brilliant. He showed variations on a woven or printed blazer in different hues and patterns with jeans. The idea was as simple as it was effective, and I wish he'd do the same for his women's line.

Craig Green is in a class by himself. The London designer, who closed the Paris shows on Sunday, also had a kind of stock tie, but he abstracted the gesture and showed it with his signature outerwear, the models all wearing spectacles with tiny LED lights on the lenses. Green does things that nobody else in fashion does, like long, slim nylon ponchos with multicolored striped hems; loose shorts in cotton jersey that suggest asymmetrical warrior skirts; beautifully knitted "sweaters" reduced to a yoke and yarn threads, and some superb combinations of silk floral prints for coats and soft pants. The prints could be read as old-fashioned, indeed old lady, but when combined, with Green's eye, they become something original.

Finally, kudos to Willy Chavarria for both a strong collection and an incredibly moving presentation on Friday, his second in Paris. It followed Dior on the schedule. When the show got underway, with the first 35 male models coming out in long white T-shirts and baggy white shirts, I thought perhaps Chavarria was making some sort of religious statement. The men's heads were bowed. Then I realized that their supplicant's posture and white clothing was actually that of prisoners, from the media images of men detained in El Salvador jails, having been transported from the U.S. The models came out in single file and then knelt down, their hands behind their backs as if cuffed. The imagery is ghastly, but so is the reality, and I'm glad Chavarria took a political stand with his show. It is possible.

Entitled "Huron," after the California town where Chavarria grew up, the collection had a more natural masculine ease, in my view, than his previous show. The relaxed suiting and shirt colors, in faded shades of red, yellow, green, and aqua, were apparently taken from industrial uniforms. Not that you would know. But isn't that the point of great fashion?

