



Balenciaga: Demna bids farewell with Hollywood glamour

Bringing down the curtains on a decade of intense creativity, designer Demna bid farewell to Balenciaga with a final collection that riffed on Hollywood glamour, intermingling the famed house's codes.

Godfrey Deeny



As noted, Demna will join Gucci, becoming the new creative director in Milan, a position held by the largest label in Kering, the luxury conglomerate that also owns Balenciaga.

The show was staged inside Balenciaga's couture atelier on Avenue George V, where limousines edged through huge crowds to the entrance. Fans went wild as Nicole Kidman, Katy Perry, Salma Hayek, Kyle MacLachlan, Justine Skye and Cardi B, who appeared as a vampish widow in black lace and a massive Cruella wig, entered the front door.

Inside, brand ambassador Kim Kardashian walked the show in a "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" ivory slip dress, a white feather "fur" coat and a ginormous necklace. It turned out to be Elizabeth Taylor's most iconic personal diamond pendant earrings from Los Angeles-based jeweler Lorraine Schwartz's private collection, an ode to Taylor, in Demna's words.

The Georgia-born couturier riffed on Cristóbal Balenciaga's oeuvre—most charmingly with a revamped houndstooth ensemble worn by the founder's fetish model Danielle back in 1967. A look that evoked his grandma's kitchen tablecloth from his childhood, Demna insisted.

While his obsession with the Golden Age of Hollywood led to a black sequined "Diva" gown inspired by Marilyn Monroe, as well as a pink "Debutante" princess dress crafted from the world's lightest technical organza at the finale.

"This collection is the perfect way for me to finish my decade at Balenciaga. I have come as close as possible to being satisfied in this endless pursuit of impossible perfection—the defining ethos of Cristóbal Balenciaga," opined Demna in his program notes.





Notably, he played a great deal with reengineered corsetry designed to be comfortable and not restrictive. And after taking a rare bow, he revealed that his starting point for the collection was the dress codes of "la bourgeoisie." Severe tailoring for women with tulip lapels that soared around the face, or coats with high-collared Medici- and Nosferatu-esque necklines. His Marianne—or couture bride—was model Eliza in a seamless Guipure lace gown shaped with millinery techniques—in a surprisingly minimalist statement.

"It's my love affair with Paris, where I have lived for 15 years, longer than in my home country, Georgia. It's a place that I love and hate," he confessed, standing before a mood board where the cast had been shot around Paris—from the Eiffel Tower to Île Saint-Louis.

In a co-ed show, he teamed up with four family-run tailors from Naples, developing signature unstructured Neapolitan shirt-jackets. He sent a bodybuilder buddy to Naples four times to create a giant suit, which was then multiplied nine times in various fabrics and worn by a cast of male characters, including Demna's partner, a sylvain, slim, androgynous figure.

"The tailors are used to making suits for men with big bellies, so it was quite a challenge... I wanted to show that it is not the garment that defines the body, but the body that defines the garment," insisted Demna in a packed backstage.

He added to the Tinsel Town moment by commissioning Schwartz to create over 1,000 carats of custom-made high jewelry with white diamonds, natural emeralds, Padparadscha sapphires, pink diamonds and canary-yellow diamonds to accessorize the collection. Meanwhile, briefcases were reinvented as a new slim-line "jewelry box" laptop case.

In an elegant gesture, most of the soundtrack was the reading of the first names of all his atelier and staff, ending with Demna, "bien sûr"—a gesture that left many of his team in tears.

Asked about his next step at Gucci, he was voluble: "What I learned is when you come to a brand with heritage and codes, you are either very lucky and you have abundant codes you can modernize or make relevant. Or the codes are restrictive, and I have to say I love Balenciaga, but the codes at Balenciaga are not in proportion to the type of business it has become. So, for ten years, I had to use the cocoon and hourglass, but that was not enough, so I had to integrate a lot of Demna codes into this house."

"Whereas for my next chapter, I have the luxury of having lots of different codes I have never used to build on. And that's something that excites me a lot. That's one of the reasons I am so excited. I am a cool guy; I am a chef, so if I have more ingredients to make a dish, it makes it very exciting," he concluded.

