



Balenciaga legend ends on high as Gucci calls

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One of couture's greatest showmen went out with a bang on the final day of Paris. Except Demna Gvasalia of Balenciaga has been more than just a showman. It might seem a contradiction in terms to describe someone who has plied their trade in the highfalutin' world of couture as an agent provocateur, but that's precisely what Gvasalia has been.

Cristóbal Balenciaga founded his house in 1917 with an aesthetic that was provocatively sculptural, and Gvasalia has taken things considerably further in the decade that he has served as creative director.

Vastly outsize cuts, Sugar Monster shoulders and Rip Van Winkle shoes have all been part of his stock-in-trade, and were among what he showcased before a front row that included the actress Nicole Kidman and the man who will take over from him, Pierpaolo Piccioli, formerly of Valentino.

Kidman wasn't the

only evidence of the celebrity pulling power of a designer who has proved, whether you like him or loathe him, to be epoch-defining. Kim Kardashian, Naomi Campbell and Isabelle Huppert were among those who walked the catwalk.

What this show underscored was the degree to which Gvasalia's Balenciaga





fairytale has always been about beauty as well as the beast. Alongside the avant-garde tailoring were princess-worthy floor-sweepers that may have been minimalist in form but were maximalist in impact — to wit, the candy-pink ruched chiffon or the

satin the colour of the midday sun. Gvasalia is heading to Gucci, which doesn't have a couture operation. But it, too, loves a statement gown. It may be Giorgio Armani's 91st birthday tomorrow, and he may also be in recovery from a recent illness, but the man who is arguably

Italy's most influential designer hasn't been taking things easy. He produced the biggest couture line-up of Paris by some margin — a remarkable 77 looks — before a front row that included the actress Angela Bassett. Some of what he showed was a tailoring-shaped riff on *le smoking*, the rest of

Left to right, Nicole Kidman, who graced the front row, an Armani model, and two of Demna Gvasalia's Balenciaga looks it dress-centric red-carpet attire. Armani must be thinking about his legacy, not to mention his succession plan, but funereal this somehow wasn't.

