



Even in absence, he is in control

PARIS

BY VANESSA FRIEDMAN

Giorgio Armani was not present at his couture show. The designer, who will celebrate his 91st birthday on Friday, had contracted bronchitis before his men's collection last month, and his doctor advised him not to travel. "In twenty years of Armani Privé," he wrote in an email sent to some attendees, "this is the first time I haven't been to Paris."

He obviously wasn't happy about the fact, because he not only said that he actually felt well enough to make the trip in his note, but also added, "Even though I wasn't in Paris, I oversaw every aspect of the show remotely via video link, from the fittings to the sequence and the make-up. Everything you will see has been done under my direction and carries my approval."

As if anyone in the audience for his ode to "the seduction of black" could have doubted it. Mr. Armani is nothing if not committed to his vision, in his design as in his business. However, just in case his absence inspired anyone to start speculating about change (and it wouldn't be a

surprise, given all the other upheavals occurring in the fashion world, from designer job switcheroos to Anna Wintour stepping back from the day-to-day operations of American Vogue), Mr. Armani had a message for them.

"If I've come this far, it's thanks to the iron focus and obsessive attention with which I manage everything," he wrote. "And that hasn't changed."

For proof, simply consider the runway.

Consider the 77 versions of night sky looks that strolled by in low-heeled booties. The velvet tuxedos and velvet jodhpurs, side seams picked out in jet, and the jackets finished in peplum swirls over the hips. The velvet pajamas and strapless velvet sheaths with Milky Ways of beads tracing the body. Or the way many of them were finished off with little velvet skull caps, sheer fingerless rhinestone gloves and velvet bow ties floating at the throat rather than pearls.

The bow ties may not have been everyone's idea of the perfect accessory — they made the models look sort of like very fancy mimes — but they were definitely his.



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