



3 key takeaways from Paris Couture Week

Americans in Paris, couture as comment and two very solid debuts. This was a week that exceeded our expectations.

By Elektra Kotsoni And Laure Guilbault



This couture season nicely surpassed our expectations. Staples like Dior, Jean Paul Gaultier, Valentino, Fendi, Givenchy, Alexis Mabille and Alexandre Vauthier may have been absent with many of the houses in transition, but it turns out there's always a bright side. "The absence of some big brands created room for smaller brands to shine," says Thierry-Maxime Lorient, the curator behind blockbuster exhibitions on legacy houses like Jean Paul Gaultier and Mugler.

And then, of course, there were the debuts. "The debuts have been good. [Jonathan Anderson's debut at] Dior was good, Celine was good, Margiela was great," says David Martin, editor-in-chief of *Odde* magazine. "I feel positive about what's coming next".

Good vibes are always good for business, too. Couture generally tends to be more resilient, as its small pool of wealthy clients are less affected by things like the economic slowdown and therefore push back less despite eye-popping prices. And couture derives part of its value from the halo effect it creates: it enhances a brand's image by highlighting craftsmanship and skill, while creating a platform for buzz.

"This couture week had a lot of the beauty and wonder that makes fashion, especially at couture prices, worth it," says Lauren Amos, owner of Atlanta concept store Antidote, and a couture client (she is considering buying pieces from Iris van Herpen and Margiela). "What makes couture worth the price is supporting the designer. With Iris, I know I am supporting an independent artist. I want to see her work continue to be shown in museums and at Paris Couture Week."

"I feel great about this couture season. Even though Dior isn't showing, all our clients are in town, so we are doing fittings for everybody," says milliner Stephen Jones, who has been working with Dior since 1996.

Americans in Paris

Many of the aforementioned clients this season were American. "Le Bal d'Été, the fundraising ball held on the eve of couture at Musée des Arts Décoratifs (MAD), brought a lot of Americans to Paris for couture. A lot of heavy-hitter American women who haven't been to Paris for a while are shopping in Europe again," says editor Lauren Santo Domingo outside of Sotheby's following the celebration of the auction house's collaboration with denim brand Frame.





Julie de Libran, who created her namesake brand of made-to-order pieces in 2019 after being artistic director of Sonia Rykiel, confirms: "I already have a very international clientele with many Americans. This time, some clients were already on vacation, but they visit Paris regularly. Our couture business is developing well and the MAD gala, indeed, brought many Americans." De Libran presented a 28-piece collection, including a tuxedo in brocade, feminine heart-shaped corsets and lingerie-inspired pieces.

"Historically, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection [in New York] has been built on American couture clients. I do wish we had more contemporary clients who would donate, but Americans are generally very supportive of couture. Being in Paris this week has felt like being in New York — everyone I know from back home is at the Ritz," notes head curator of the Anna Wintour Costume Centre at the Met Andrew Bolton.

Alexis Mabille, a haute couture member, still had orders despite skipping this season's presentation to focus on January — including from American clients. "January is always better for business than July anyway. It has to do with the international holiday calendar," the designer explains. "We met clients as usual. I have more time for them. Not presenting doesn't prevent from creating and producing."

Uranus in Gemini, algae dresses and angry birds: Couture as comment

Schiaparelli, Iris van Herpen and Viktor & Rolf held high-impact shows that revealed a clear preoccupation with the state of our world — albeit from entirely different viewpoints. On one hand, the Schiaparelli show featured a necklace in the shape of a heart that was *actually* beating, Cardi B holding a crow and many musings on the state of our politics in conjunction with Uranus entering Gemini (the next seven years are expected to be very chaotic).

"When coming to couture, the show that you are most grateful to be invited to is Schiaparelli," said celebrity stylist Law Roach at the post-show cocktail party, which was also laden with American couture clients. "One thing that you can count on every single season with Daniel [Roseberry], is that you will get a show. I think that's what we need. Clothes are supposed to feel aspirational and be able to transport you to somewhere else. Daniel is a master of that and we are so blessed that we get this every six months."

Van Herpen, who now shows couture only once a year, on the other hand, presented a light spectacle of alternative fabrics dedicated to the ocean. The collection includes a dress that is alive (yes, really): "For me, it was the next step, in not being inspired by nature, but collaborating with nature. That's a mindset that is a global movement, a call for action for all of us," van Herpen explained backstage. Asked how long the dress will live, she replied: "No one knows. It's like a human being. It needs eight hours of sleep and sunlight." Jean Paul Gaultier, who knows a thing or two about performances, applauded. "It's like a full dream. I love the technique, the poetry, fabulous experience," he said.

"Schiaparelli creative director Daniel Roseberry and Iris van Herpen are almost the same age, around 40. It's nice to see the young generation exploring the future of couture with such creative freedom," says Lorient.

Viktor & Rolf showed 15 pairs of dresses — each pair featured two of the same dress, only one had been inflated with feathers to become both voluminous and sculptural, while the other was bare. "The thousands of feathers found in their dresses and in Stephen Jones's hats were not from birds, but all handmade in silk gauze fabric in their Amsterdam ateliers, innovating again and developing techniques with preoccupation about animal protection by making sure they do not use any fur or animal skins in their creations," Lorient says.

"We thought of [game series] Angry Birds," said the designers backstage when asked what inspired the collection. "I think we all are angry birds."





Making and creating space for the future

At Chanel, we saw the last collection created by the studio, before Matthieu Blazy takes over in October. The incoming designer attended the first of two shows, in a show of support to his new team, a level of discretion that echoed the famously low profile of the Wertheimer brothers at the house's runways. Christelle Kocher, artistic director at Maison Lemarie, one of Chanel's speciality métiers d'art workshops, says: "We collaborated a lot on the collection with very sophisticated details such as Lognon pleats. It was rich in detail." Hubert Barrère, artistic director of Lesage, another of Chanel's métiers d'arts, praised "the apparent simplicity of the materials at the outset to arrive at an extraordinary sophistication". Kocher and Barrère have started collaborating with Blazy but stayed mum on what's to come.

Demna, who said goodbye to Balenciaga on Wednesday, also seemed to be thinking about what's to come: "It just felt like I could not do better than this at Balenciaga, and I felt like it's a good time for me to move on to the next chapter," he said backstage. "In my next chapter, I have quite a luxury of having a lot of different codes that I have actually never had to build on before — and that's something that excites me." The designer is expected to officially start at Gucci within the next few days (his "first hints" will be unveiled in September, as Kering deputy CEO Francesca Bellettini announced during the group's first-quarter earnings, and his debut show will be held in February).

The debuts

Celine showed its spring 2026 collection on the eve of couture, a strategic slot before the dozen of debuts in September/October. Creative director Michael Rider sent out a mix of different silhouettes and proportions, including strong eveningwear such as a classic little black dress. "I am very positive. I saw lots of new proposals, new shapes, while keeping the spirit of the brand. Michael is comfortable in Paris. He understands the Parisienne, an international Parisienne. I think it's going to be a hit," Sidney Toledano, senior advisor to LVMH chair and CEO Bernard Arnault, told *Vogue Business* after the show. There were lots of accessories, jewellery, scarves, bags and belts with the Triomphe brand signifier, alongside some more playful uses of the logo. "We are in a time of designing newness, about silhouettes, it's not just marketing," Toledano added.

Overall, the show was well received. "I think that Michael gave us a new Celine woman that was familiar but also felt new. The accessories were incredible. And I think that he gave you a lot of options to build a wardrobe, which I think is important, especially with the economy," says Roach.

On Wednesday, Glenn Martens delivered the highlight of the week in the form of his debut show for Maison Margiela. It was a collection that elegantly but clearly referenced his predecessors, yet was ultimately very much his own and very much of our time. There were upcycled fabrics, draped metallics, dip-dyed nails that poked out of the breasts of jackets, as well as feathers and beading set against a patchwork wallpaper that was coming away from the walls. It was apocalyptic and emotional, with many of the attendees we asked for a comment post-show saying they needed "a moment to digest". Luckily for them, there was a sea of balloons to play with at the afterparty. "It was explosive, and it's loud. But perhaps, this is what the world needs," says Renzo Rosso, chair of OTB, the company that owns Margiela.

"With all of this change coming in, fashion has been treading water for a while now, and it was hard to get particularly excited when it feels like a fallow period," says fashion director of editorial and partnerships at *Dazed* Emma Davidson. "We're really in need of something new and innovative, and I hope we get it. I do hope that we'll see fashion make more big statements, though; Willy Chavarria did that during menswear. And Glenn Martens's debut was the perfect tension between MM's codes and his own offbeat approach to creating clothing."





Will September and its myriad of debuts usher in the change fashion needs and snap us out of the gloom like the balloons at Margiela? One way or another, it will be very busy, so try to get some beach time in between.

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