

# The Great Fashion Reset: Can Designer Revamps Save Fashion?

Chanel, Dior, Gucci and more are betting big on creative reboots to reignite consumer demand amid the biggest luxury slump since 2008. But sticking the landing on an aesthetic refresh is easier said than done, and a new generation of creative directors faces the same systemic challenges that stymied predecessors.

By Robert Williams



Fashion is midway through an unprecedented year of designer turnover: Givenchy, Tom Ford, Dries Van Noten, Dior (men's), Celine and Margiela have already launched new creative visions.

Brands debuting new creative directions this autumn include: Chanel, Gucci, Dior (women's), Balenciaga, Bottega Veneta, Jil Sander, Loewe, Versace, Mugler and Jean Paul Gaultier.

The wave of designer changes promises to reignite interest in luxury fashion amid a sharp decline in consumer demand. But translating novelty into marketing narratives, products, store concepts and more is a lengthy process with no guaranteed outcome.

High commercial stakes, soaring prices and an ultra-fast-paced, saturated landscape for marketing and distribution continue to put pressure on fashion creativity.

A tsunami of excitement sweeps the fashion system as new creative directors take the reins across luxury's top brands, driving shoppers back to stores. At least that's what brands are betting on.

Going into a month packed with designer debuts — 10 of fashion's biggest names including Chanel, Gucci and Dior are set to unveil revamped creative visions between now and early October — many industry insiders are more measured in their outlook, noting that success is far from guaranteed as a hyper-competitive season plays out against a difficult macroeconomic backdrop for luxury.

Even the most successful designer refreshes will face the same pressures that stymied predecessors: the challenge of creating products and imagery that read as "new" without alienating a diverse, global mix of existing customers; steep price inflation that has narrowed the audience for luxury fashion; and a saturated, ultra-fast-paced media environment that is making it harder for novel propositions to cut through the noise and stick.

"If you define creativity as expressing a strong personal ideology, being fearless, being willing to experiment, then it's harder and harder to operate creatively in today's landscape. The bigger the house, the more complicated it is," art director and Self Service magazine co-founder Ezra Petronio said. "The





potential cost of risk taking is so high. And when you're addressing such a big, global audience things often need to be flattened out and simplified for the mass market."

Still, the wide-reaching creative reset is seen as fashion's best hope for reigniting demand after two years of falling sales.

"It's harder to question the system, to propose new ideas when everything's working — so this moment is a big opportunity," said Lucien Pagès, founder of the eponymous Paris PR firm.

While the consumer economy is less buoyant than during its heady post-Covid rebound, experts see stagnant creativity (along with inflated prices) as having exacerbated the slowdown.

"There had been a sort of collective tiredness: tired of the fashion cycle, tired of iterative design. It became hard to find the headspace to appreciate and untangle the creativity that *is* out there due to this tiresome rhythm," said Judd Crane, executive director for buying and brand at Selfridges. "We're feeling this mood of excitement for newness, and anticipating renewed desirability at several key brands."

## Mega-Brand Refresh

Over the next month, three of luxury's five biggest brands are embarking on designer reboots, setting the scene for a new fashion era.

Gucci — which stagnated, then slipped in its final years under designer Alessandro Michele and CEO Marco Bizzarri — has been in free-fall since the duo's exit. Sales fell 16 percent in the first half of 2025, on top of a 23 percent decline last year. Following two years under creative director Sabato De Sarno — whose effort at restoring sensual, sartorial glamour to the brand failed to catch fire — star designer Demna has been brought over from Kering stablemate Balenciaga to revamp the brand.

Demna brings a native understanding of how internet culture changed fashion along with both a savvy touch for accessible products like sneakers and merch and a devoted following for his high-end ready-to-wear. Gucci will provide a first glimpse at his efforts during Milan Fashion Week on September 23 — though it's holding fire on a full-fledged runway show until next spring.

Dior, LVMH's second-biggest brand, has also seen sales decline sharply as clients pull back. Under former creative directors Maria Grazia Chiuri and Kim Jones and CEO Pietro Bizzarri, revenues nearly quadrupled from €2.7 billion (\$3.2 billion) in 2018 to more than €9 billion in 2023. But over the past two years, customers have balked at steep price hikes as well as storytelling and design that was seen as too repetitive. Current CEO Delphine Arnault is now counting on Jonathan Anderson, fresh off a transformative tenure at the group's smaller Loewe brand, to rejuvenate Dior with his prolific creativity, curatorial sensibility and cast of of-the-moment collaborators in art and cinema.

Anderson's well-received debut menswear show in June teased a cool, neo-preppy silhouette. His Oct. 1 womenswear debut will be the next test of how his off-kilter, often niche sensibility can continue to impress while being adapted for a commercial juggernaut.

Even blue-chip couture-and-beauty giant Chanel — previously seen as unassailable — has come under pressure from a slow-burning grassroots assault on its runway creativity, styling and the quality of its manufacturing: called out by customers and content creators on social media as not up to par with its top-of-the-line pricing. Revenues fell 4 percent last year.

Matthieu Blazy, a poised and approachable spokesperson known for his exacting behind-the-scenes leadership on design, product development, materials innovation and art direction, has taken over the brand's creative direction and is set to debut his vision at its Oct. 1 ready-to-wear show.

For financial analyst Luca Solca, the creative shakeups were a business necessity. "This was required. Prices have gone up a lot — especially in soft luxury. If consumers need to spend more, it has to be at







least for something new and exciting,” he said. “The industry is built on making heritage current. Not innovation at all costs, but innovation that puts the brand equity at the centre of attention and at the centre of the social debate today.”

## Reboot or Slipstream?

Anderson and Blazy have left red-hot brands and businesses in their wake at LVMH’s Loewe and Kering’s Bottega Veneta, respectively.

Both brands will nonetheless need to commit to their new creative directors’ visions if they want to maintain their reputations for cutting-edge creativity. Louise Trotter, formerly of Carven and Lacoste, will stage her debut for Bottega Veneta Sept. 27. Jack McCollough and Lazaro Hernandez, the co-founders of New York’s Proenza Schouler, will follow with their first show for Loewe in Paris Oct. 3.

At the same time, both brands — among the few to have continued growing as the wider industry slumped — will likely be careful not to disrupt their relatively resilient commercial performance. Head-to-toe overhauls of merchandising and communications, as seen at Valentino under Alessandro Michele since 2024, are unlikely.

At Kering’s Balenciaga, excitement for Demna’s more accessible merch has cooled in recent seasons. But the brand’s sculptural, subversive couture collections and savvy celebrity partnerships have left it with a powerful platform that may better be retooled than fully rebooted under new creative director Pierpaolo Piccioli, formerly Valentino’s longtime creative chief.

Futuristic, norm-core, goth — key themes that fuelled the brand under Demna — may no longer be the fastest-growing buzzwords in fashion. But they evoke enduring customer archetypes who can be reactivated through new creative. “Our intention is to evolve. It’s not to lose the business and the segment that Balenciaga already had, but to build on this with the aesthetic that Pierpaolo will bring to the brand,” Kering’s deputy CEO Francesca Bellettini said in a July call with investors.

Other brands getting in on fashion’s creative reset this season include OTB’s Jil Sander (which tapped Simone Bellotti, former creative director of Bally), L’Oréal’s Mugler (where former Sportmax designer Miguel Castro Freitas is taking the reins) and Puig’s Jean Paul Gaultier (relaunching ready-to-wear under Duran Lantink).

Capri-owned Versace is also in the midst of a creative transition, emerging as a notable wild card in the season. Expectations were high for new creative director Dario Vitale, who recently played a key role turning Miu Miu into fashion’s hottest brand. But his Milan debut has been postponed — replaced by a low-key presentation — after Versace turned loss-making, while a deal to sell the brand to Prada Group has yet to close. A first peek at Vitale’s vision did little to reassure the market: Julia Roberts — a megawatt star, albeit with no aesthetic or creative connection to Versace — wore a sharp but generic jeans and blazer by the brand to the Venice Film Festival, followed by an archive-inspired black harlequin gown.

## Marketing Rollout

In today’s celebrity-driven internet culture, establishing a credible, coherent and ideally surprising programme of red-carpet partnerships can be as powerful as the runway for fuelling interest in a brand.

That explains why Versace isn’t the only brand to have capitalised on Venice this year as a platform for providing sneak peaks at their new creative directors’ visions ahead of a busy fashion month, or to keep up momentum for recent debuts: Dior teased its upcoming womenswear debut by Anderson, dressing actresses Alba Rohrwacher (in a bustled crepe gown) and Mia Goth; Bottega Veneta’s Trotter dressed Jacob Elordi and new ambassador Vicky Krieps.





Tom Ford, which staged a well-received womenswear debut by designer Haider Ackermann in March, threw a star-studded party, dressing Tilda Swinton and Kate Moss.

Maison Margiela, which staged its first haute couture show by Glenn Martens in July, has fought to hold onto its renewed spotlight: the brand eschewed its longstanding codes of anonymity — tapping Miley Cyrus for its first-ever celebrity campaign, days before dressing Kim Kardashian and Cate Blanchett at the Venice gathering.

But creating runway and red carpet moments are just the tip of the iceberg for designers at global brands that require their input on more touchpoints than ever. From mainline collections, carry-over products and one-off VIP ensembles to collaborations, ad campaigns, store concepts and commercial capsules for beach, Lunar New Year and more, “everything has to be aligned,” Pagès said.

“Being a creative director is no longer just about creating a silhouette — it’s also about shaping a point of view. You’re a cultural interpreter, working across product, image, values and community,” said Julian Klausner, who staged his first womenswear show as creative director of Dries Van Noten in March, followed by a menswear debut in June that was a highlight of the Paris season. “It demands that you listen more, delegate well, and keep the vision elastic — but still anchored.”

## Brand Halo

Fully transitioning a brand’s output to a new aesthetic can take years. Still, the biggest luxury brands can begin to reap the benefits of a creative director change almost immediately after broadcasting a new vision: many customers buy into luxury without much attention to who designed the products, and can be influenced by an uptick in buzz months before refreshed collections arrive in stores.

Dior’s June menswear debut owned the fashion conversation for days, fuelling a steady drip of content about archival references, celebrity attendees, a watch party and potential “it” bags. Some of that attention translates to store traffic.

“There were so many layers to unpeel at Dior; it gave people a lot to get excited about. For brands that took those kind of steps, we see some really positive business coming through thanks to the halo on the brand,” Selfridges’ Crane said. “At the same time, we’re still anticipating a lot of people will hold back for new products to arrive.”

Smaller, more fashion-driven brands have to make tough choices about when and where to allocate their creative focus and budget.

Givenchy, which staged its womenswear debut by Sarah Burton in March has been less focused on driving social media chatter than with restoring the brand’s prestige: renewing ties with stylists and fashion magazines in an effort to have a stronger editorial presence by the time the collection arrived in stores. A single-brand shoot in *Vogue* starring Anne Hathaway was a big win, followed by a campaign starring Adut Akech, Kaia Gerber and more. Venice may have to wait for next year.

## New Products

While runway creativity, red carpet, social media content and campaigns often drive the conversation surrounding an aesthetic refresh — novel products are what brands may need most. “Eighty percent of what this industry is about is product. Everything else has to support,” Solca said.

What will those products look like? Brands that rely less on seasonal fashion — like Hermès, Brunello Cucinelli, Loro Piana and Zegna — have proven more resilient during the industry’s recent downturn. But seeking to emulate their understated aesthetics could backfire. “Timeless designs are great. But the problem is consumers may already have them in their wardrobe. I have a feeling that ‘quiet luxury’ is past its peak,” Solca said.







Selfridges' Crane sees fashion demand in two camps — with continued momentum for “archetypal” products like a Birkin bag or the perfect cashmere sweater coexisting alongside renewed interest in bold, seasonal looks.

“Recently there’s been a lot of stuff that’s sort of in-between, which doesn’t respond to the growing sense of discernment in the market. I see it moving to the extremities: a mix of core, comforting, understandable pieces and ones that can really excite the imagination,” Crane said.

## The Next Big Bang?

Fashion is hoping this year’s creative reset could ignite a new era of excitement and demand: much like in 1997, when Galliano’s theatrical take on Dior, McQueen’s Givenchy, Nicolas Ghesquière’s Balenciaga and Martin Margiela’s Hermès were all nascent concepts accelerating the fusion of fashion creativity, pop culture and French couture (as documented in a recent exhibition at Paris’ Palais Galliera fashion museum). The same year in Milan, Tom Ford’s Gucci was hitting its sleazy stride and Prada was making waves with its subversive, “ugly pretty” twists on Milanese glamour.

1997’s fashion “big bang” also coincided with a business that needed rethinking: sales in Japan (previously luxury’s biggest export market) were slowing, and fresh ideas were needed to make European heritage relevant for a burgeoning US market. This time, it’s an over-dependence on China that needs weaning, while the US has become more volatile and polarised across brands. Despite buoyant pockets like the Gulf, it’s unclear which markets the industry can turn to next in order to capitalise on its creative refresh.

With many luxury stocks already depressed, however, financial markets are likely to focus on the upside. “The stock market will be fast to react to any subtle sign of inflection. The feedback on the upcoming fashion shows will be very important,” Solca said. “Then, most often, self-help stories tend to work like yo-yos, rising on expectations and sometimes falling back on disappointing updates. Prada, Burberry, Ferragamo, Kering have all been following this pattern multiple times.”

“All the hiring and firing puts brands’ names in the media spotlight — but the hiring is simply the beginning of a new chapter,” *System* magazine co-founder Elizabeth von Guttman said. “Desirability requires time and is incredibly tough to maintain — winners and losers will inevitably emerge.”

The industry will need to be patient while designers and brands find their footing, both creatively and commercially.

“Not everything can work right away. It takes time to put something in place and to refine it, and for it to find its audience. But you do need some strong early signals to make people believe,” Pagès said.

“It’s very hard to come back from a bad debut.”

