

## This Week: London Fashion Week's Comeback Attempt; All Eyes on the Fed

A new British Fashion Council CEO hopes to bring more emerging designers to the schedule, though Burberry and H&M will likely hog the spotlight. Plus, the Federal Reserve makes a key interest rate decision.

By Brian Baskin



**What's Happening:** London Fashion Week kicks off on Thursday as the British Fashion Council, under new CEO Laura Weir, tries to reinvigorate the event and reassert its status as a launchpad for emerging designers amid a sharp downturn in luxury demand.

**Baby Steps:** Weir has eliminated the fees that designers had to pay to show on the week's official schedule and increased funding to bring in foreign press. These are smart moves to bring some buzz back to a week that's lost key names to Paris and Milan, and is seen as a pricey distraction by some up-and-coming talent.

**Bad Timing:** It would be an uphill battle any season, but this time the BFC is up against a particularly tough environment for emerging designers, who have been hit by rising costs and financial troubles at key retailers. Still, after a string of defections, the schedule has stabilised, with mainstays like Erdem, Simone Rocha and Roksanda, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary, showing, along with rising talents like Aaron Esh, Dilara Findikoglu and Paolo Carzana, as well as cult label Chopova Lowena.

Some are hopeful that Weir might coax McQueen, Victoria Beckham or Stella McCartney to join the roster, but for the moment Burberry remains the week's sole anchor. Under new CEO Joshua Schulman, it'll be looking to solidify its pivot from "modern" to "timeless" British style. Meanwhile, JW Anderson, typically a big draw, is missing, as the Dior designer pivots his namesake label from pure fashion to a broader conception of the brand built around lifestyle and homeware.

**The Interloper:** The first night of the week is headlined, not by a British heritage brand or a new designer fresh out of Central Saint Martins, but with H&M, which is mounting a multi-part "experience" that includes a coed runway show. Last September, the Swedish fast fashion giant staged a Charli XCX concert in London, which kicked off a global campaign meant to re-energise the brand's image. This includes a second "H&M Atelier" collection, intended to hammer home the idea that the brand is about more than cheap basics.

The results on that front are tentatively positive: Sales are growing again after a long slide, though the company itself acknowledges its turnaround will be more of a marathon than a sprint.





## Fed Up

**What's Happening:** The Federal Reserve meets on Tuesday and Wednesday, and is expected to cut benchmark interest rates by a quarter percentage point in an effort to boost the flagging US economy.

**A Delicate Balance:** The Fed has a narrow and difficult path to follow, as it looks to stimulate growth without triggering too much inflation. Its task is further complicated by President Donald Trump, who has repeatedly expressed his view that the Fed has been too slow to cut, even going so far as to attempt — unsuccessfully, so far — to oust a sitting member of the board before her term is up.

**The Fashion Angle:** Last week, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that apparel prices rose in August at their fastest pace in six months. Still, inflation overall, while rising, is not so high as to put off next week's cut. That will come as a relief to retailers, which will pay less to finance inventory and other costs, as well as consumers, who will find it a little easier to pay off their credit card bills.

Both could use the boost; surveys from Deloitte, PwC and others released this month are predicting weak holiday spending. We'll get one more data point on that front when the US Census Bureau releases retail sales data for August on Sept. 16.

*The Week Ahead wants to hear from you! Send tips, suggestions, complaints and compliments to [brian.baskin@businessoffashion.com](mailto:brian.baskin@businessoffashion.com).*

