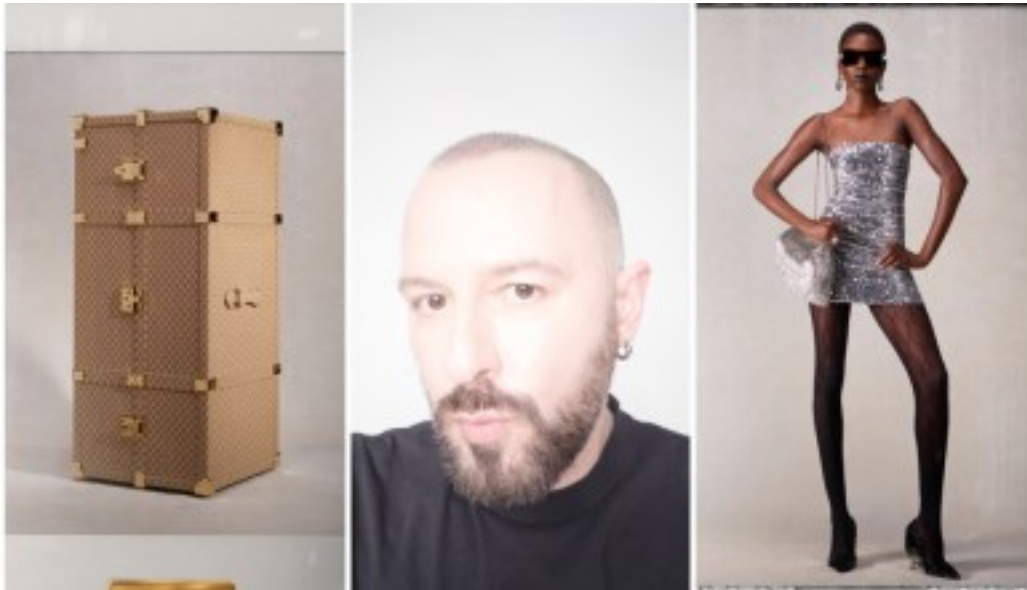




EXCLUSIVE: Demna Redefines ‘Gucciness’: Inside His Debut as Gucci’s Artistic Director



Demna is presenting his first collection for Gucci during Milan Fashion Week Courtesy of Gucci

MILAN — “I’m a fighter and I have to prove things to myself most of the time in my life, so the outside expectations become like a side effect.”

So said Demna in his first exclusive interview ahead of his debut as artistic director of Gucci. He is fully aware that the stakes are high and that his first designs for the Italian fashion brand will be microscopically scrutinized, but he clearly knows how to cope with the pressure.

Sitting in the luminous office at the brand’s Milan sprawling headquarters, Demna, dressed in black and wearing a gold chain with a Gucci crest, was careful to describe the first looks that go live Monday as “baby steps. I’m not yet defining my Gucci vision, but the platform on which I build that. I want to reset the understanding and perception of what Gucci is through my reinterpretation.”

While shying away from taking full credit for the looks, and often citing Tom Ford as an inspiration — the designer who’s part of the “trinity” that includes Martin Margiela and Lee McQueen — the spring 2026 lineup is clearly a positive progression that is likely to hit the spot in the market.

To telegraph the “Gucciness” of Gucci, Demna created a series of characters who are part of “La Famiglia,” each with their own personality and attitude. Working with newly installed chief executive officer Francesca Bellettini, the designer decided to release a look book photographed by Catherine Opie on Monday, ahead of the short film “The Tiger” that will be shown on Tuesday evening in Milan, directed by Spike Jonze and Halina Reijn.



While details on the film's cast are being kept under wraps, Demi Moore is one of the actors embodying a character conceived as part of La Famiglia.

"From the very beginning, I shaped the collection by imagining a constellation of characters, asking myself what Gucci means to me, from its archive to the many identities it embodies," Demna said. "I gathered an imaginary family to carry the story, each figure holding a fragment of the broader narrative. Since my first show will be in February, I felt like the story of La Famiglia should be told through a short film. I shared it with Spike and Halina, whose work I've long admired, and they created their film, 'The Tiger,' inspired by these characters."

The look book opens with L'Archetipo, a monogrammed travel trunk that underscores how founder Guccio Gucci began the company as a luggage-maker. "I think it's a very important part of the history that I don't feel was enough of a focus in recent years. It represents the beginning, everything that this brand was built on," Demna said.

Next up is L'Incazzata, a colloquial way to say "very angry," telegraphing Demna's undercurrent of irony.

"This is a global brand, but I also wanted to put the accent on the Italianness of it," said the designer, explaining the choice of names for the characters. This character is portrayed by Maria Carla Boscono, who wears a 1960s-style feminine red coat with gold GG closures that was inspired by Jackie Kennedy. The actress carries a revisited bamboo bag, and wears black leather gloves, horsebit pumps with high chunky heels, a Flora scarf around her head and big dark sunglasses. A large silver flower brooch completes the chic look.

The image has a very special meaning for Demna. "Red is, for me, a very Gucci color because it's part of the [brand's signature] web, and it's the color of passion, but also, when I was a child, I fell in love with a little red coat I saw in a store. I've told this story a million times before, but I have to, because it's important, there's a personal connection to me and why this is the first look. I didn't care that it was a girl's coat, I didn't need to wear it, I just wanted to see it every day. That was the beginning of my relationship with fashion, I was so obsessed with this coat."

He bought it, but while Demna was asleep, "my family gave it back to the store and told me that it fell off the balcony. I couldn't forgive my family; I knew they lied to me because they didn't want me to have it, so I always had this frustration about this little red coat taken away from the little me. Opening with this, I felt like it was a very significant symbolic thing. I think symbolism is important in everything you do in fashion."

While Demna understands Italian and has been learning more words, he admitted he had not heard the term "sprezzatura," which he infused into the looks.

"It's a laid-back ease and studied nonchalance," he explained, which he wanted the looks to have.

Indeed, the designs swing between minimalist and maximalist. Cue the regal quilted Flora floor-length dress with a high collar and zipped up in the front or, in a stunning dark version for La Contessa, the floral pattern is rendered on a black background and has leg-of-lamb sleeves. This kind of sleeve is also seen in a beautiful shearling coat in a singular azure hue worn by La Sciura, a Milanese term for woman.

Mrs. La Principessa dons a '70s pussy-bow gown in bubble-gum pink and feather trims, which has hints of Alessandro Michele, while La Diva's electric blue mock fur was inspired by Sophia Loren, Demna said.

These grand looks contrast with the seamless, stretch, embroidered short tube dress worn by Miss Aperitivo; La Ragazza, the girl, who wears a black turtleneck over a



crocodile miniskirt and stiletto boots, or La Gallerista, in an all-black, formfitting pantsuit and silk blouse. The men wear loose pants and black denim jeans with horsebit details and The Figo, a biker jacket that also has horsebit details over roomy stonewashed jeans. The Cocco di Mamma, or mama's boy, wears an oversize Prince of Wales coat.

"Gucci is also a lot about the attitude, all of these characters are confident, they have a point of view, they love fashion and they love clothes." Surely there is Demna's point of view here, adapted to Gucci.

"To me, all these archetypes represent the Gucci crowd, the customers of Gucci in the future who will each of them be able to find something in the collection that they can relate to. It's not like one, mono silhouette, mono everything, like you either like it or not situation," said Demna, admitting he was experimenting with minimalism, "something very new for me, and super exciting, because it's the most difficult aesthetic in design that you can do and I want to do it in a modern way. And I found a lot of minimalist references in Tom Ford's era, which I find very, very inspiring. And I think I want to build and evolve that in future."

Lightness is also a key word for Demna in this collection, seen in the feather trims or the embroidered mousseline coat stitched with little strips of shearling.

The evening dresses will no doubt be a hit with many of the Gucci A-list guests expected at the premiere of the film, such as the beautiful gold-embroidered dress with an open back worn by La Mecenat. After all, this is the first time the brand is being helmed by a designer who is also a couturier.

The GG monogram was revisited in a silk twill blouse over a canvas A-line skirt worn by La Vip and in a laminated trenchcoat seen on La V.I.C.

The lineup may be just an aperitif, but it feels like an assured effort from Demna, which will be followed by the film, or "the dessert," as he described it with a smile. And to capitalize on what is expected to be strong demand from consumers, the clothes will be available in 10 stores the day after the premiere for two weeks in Los Angeles, New York, London, Milan, Paris, Beijing, Shanghai, Singapore, Seoul and Tokyo.

In the interview, Demna took the time to speak about his vision for the brand, his appreciation for Milan and the Gucci team, and his excitement for what's to come.

Reflective and eloquent, he clearly does not leave anything to chance, and his passion for his job — and the product, which comes up repeatedly in the conversation — is palpable.

"Coming here is a big responsibility, but I would never have accepted to embark on this amazing, new, huge journey without having a vision," he said simply. "That's the first thing I did in order to be able to avoid the stress of it because stress comes when you don't know what you want to do."

WWD: How are you adjusting to Milan and to this new chapter of your life?

Demna: I've been to Milan a few times before, but I never really stayed here for longer than a day. I've been discovering the city since July, because I was looking for an apartment and I really saw the beauty of Milan, the buildings, the hidden courtyards, the poetic, cinematic side of the city that I didn't know before. It's a city that feels real and a bit brutal and Brutalist in some places. I love that. I love the variety of things that I see here and the people, I love the directness, and there's a lot of young, cool people. I feel like fashion is important for them. I didn't know that and I love seeing it, of course, because that's how I feel myself. I see a lot of people who are really into what they wear, and I think they take it seriously. I love that mentality.

WWD: Did you find the apartment?



D.: Yes, I still have a few boxes to unpack, but it's fun. I moved all my life, since I was a kid. Moving is part of my DNA, although I would say, right now, with age, I prefer to move a bit less. I like to know places and have my habits and all of that. I spent 15 years in Paris, and I actually have never lived in one place for so long as I lived in Paris. Even before the Gucci conversation started, I was already thinking, what would be my next place? Paris had become a bit claustrophobic, because it's a big city, but you know everyone. I love being here. I'm very excited and my husband is, too. I feel very, very inspired by the Italianness of the city.

WWD: I know you also visited Florence and the archive there. What was your takeaway, and what impressed you the most?

D.: That was very important for me, because it was at the beginning, when we were talking about Gucci and I knew I didn't know enough, I would say I knew bits and pieces. I discovered this brand when I was a teenager watching Fashion TV. Tom Ford and Gucci shows were kind of a benchmark for the 13-, 14- year-old me, who dreamt of fashion but I didn't know much of the history before that. Going to the archive was even more than inspiring. It was like a revelation in some way. It excited me. And when I came out, I was like, OK, I want to come here and I want to figure out what my vision is.

I didn't know the Gucci crest, for example, or the whole story of Guccio Gucci, where he started, where he came from, and being so intelligent and so innovative for the times. Also to come back from London and have all these ideas, and then start the brand that became what it is, which is one of the biggest and most globally recognized brands. I found that so inspiring, understanding where Gucci came from, because I come from that kind of background — nothing was really given to me in my life and I had to work for it. I had to fight for it. And I feel like when you come from that kind of background and you succeed, it's extremely inspiring.

I was so impressed by the variety of leather goods. I never really had in my past experiences the possibility to have so many codes. I worked for brands that didn't have even a few of those codes so I had to invent them. This is like going to Disneyland for an artistic director. I think you can count on one hand the brands that have that variety of codes to build on — maybe not even one hand.

WWD: The back history in accessories is there, as you say, but in terms of fashion, Gucci is almost like a clean slate in a way, because Tom Ford created one, Frida Giannini had another one, and Alessandro Michele yet had another one. How do you feel about the fashion angle? Can it be totally new?

D.: Definitely. Gucci is quite unique in that. I don't know many brands where you have that freedom of creative vision with every new chapter because usually you have this overwhelming and very scary shadow of the founder, who did something 100 years ago that you always need to compare and to kind of almost justify what you do. Most of the Parisian houses have that situation, and that's what I went through a lot, and I always found it beautiful, because you have to find the connection and link to it, but also limiting. Because, if I always have to think about the element that defined the aesthetic of the brand 50 or 100 years ago, it doesn't always work today, and you're less agile. What I saw as an opportunity for me as a creative at Gucci, on top of having the codes that are unique and very rare, I also have the opportunity of building a new vision based on my creativity, my brain and my intuition mostly. I don't need to get inspired by the collections of Gucci's ready-to-wear from the '60s. It's the mindset, it's the Gucciness of Gucci. Actually, it's the first time in my life that I felt it's freeing to see that and to think that way. I feel I'm very lucky to be able to have the balance between the multitude of codes from A to Z, from a loafer to the bamboo and everything in between, and the silks and the Flora and all that, but then also having this clean slate on which I can build something new that you know makes sense for Gucci in 2025 or '26.



WWD: On a personal level, I am sure you know that there's a lot of attention on you and on Gucci, heading a major brand for a major group. How do you cope with this? Do you just shrug it off as white noise in the background? Do you focus on yourself and your work?

D.: I was aware coming here, but I'm so used to it, that I kind of become almost numb to that. There's stressful expectations from Day One, but I have stressful expectations on me.

Last December, I went to L.A. for a couple of weeks, I was honored and I wanted to think about the aesthetic vision I could propose to Gucci before we could even go further in the conversation, and then I sent it to Francesca just after Christmas. And from that moment on, the stress of expectation for me was gone, because I knew that I loved what I was proposing, then I hoped, of course, that they would love it, too, because that was the next step.

WWD: Can you share that vision with us?

D.: I think it's something that is now a work-in-progress until my show in February, which is going to be the first show. From the very beginning, I decided that I could not hold a show this year because I only started working here in July, and for me it's such a big project, I need at least one proper season to build my vision, to evolve it based on the first research that I started, and also to create a fashion show that actually announces the new era of this brand. I don't know, maybe other people can do it in two months, I'm very perfectionist in my approach. This is like my Erasmus year for Gucci. I think a lot of expectations for me here, in general, are that I come here and do oversize jackets and put logos on it. Why would I come to Gucci to do what I've done before? I feel like it's superficial to expect that from me. For me, people who expect that, they don't really know, artistically, who I am. If someone thinks that I will come here and do an oversize bomber with a GG monogram, it means they didn't understand anything about my work until now.

WWD: Surely it's early days but have you already considered Gucci's lifestyle concept, the ultra-luxe Salons also part of the turnaround strategy?

D.: Yes, as the artistic director, you have to consider the full package, the visuals, and how we communicate with our customers in the store. I've been working and researching already since a couple of months. Obviously, it's too early now, but we try as fast as we can. It's also a big brand in which it's very hard to change things from one day to another and we need to work it through. After my first show, the beginning of the Demna chapter, I think that will be the moment to talk about those things more broadly.

