

## This Week: Gucci and Versace Soft Launch in Milan

Two of Italy's most prominent brands are managing expectations for their designer debuts this week. Jil Sander and Bottega Veneta will also reveal aesthetic revamps.

By Robert Williams



*This edition of The Week Ahead is brought to you by High Margin, a newsletter from chief luxury correspondent-at-large Robert Williams that will launch soon. Each week, Williams will bring together perspectives on creativity and commerce from fashion and watches to art, hospitality and more.*

Hope springs eternal. But the chances that fashion's season of designer reshuffles will produce an aesthetic "big bang" in Milan look increasingly slim, as four major Italian brands — Gucci, Versace, Jil Sander and Bottega Veneta — prepare to reveal refreshed aesthetics this week.

### Soft Launch

Two of them have sought to scale back expectations for their debuts. Rather than a full-on runway show, Gucci will stage a Sept. 23 presentation of Demna's first collection for the brand, including a film, reportedly focused on the designer's take on the label's archives.

The star designer apparently needs more time to engineer a full-fledged vision for Gucci. Kering named him creative director back in March, but he stayed on at stablemate Balenciaga into July, so he could go out with a bang during haute couture week.

The approach could delay the urgent matter of restoring Gucci's fashion authority and offering customers novel products, but will allow Demna's first collection to be revealed once the dust has settled on rival debuts at Chanel and Dior. It also buys incoming CEO Francesca Bellettini, formerly Kering's deputy CEO for brand development, some more time to put the worst of Gucci's financial crisis behind it: she and Demna can align their tenures with a hoped-for renaissance at Italy's biggest brand after sales tumbled over 40 percent in two years.

Then there's Versace, which won't stage a runway show either. An "intimate event" is set for Sept. 26.

Versace finds itself in the tricky position of launching a new designer's vision in the middle of an ownership change. The brand turned loss making in 2025, and Capri Holdings has little incentive to subsidise a splashy debut for a label that's meant to be off its books by the end of the year.





Beyond financing creative director Dario Vitale's show, there's the question of whether it would even make sense to invest in amplifying a new designer's message just before Prada Group takes over — surely with its own strategy for the brand.

Keeping the circle small feels like a sensible move. The downside is that a scaled-back presentation may struggle to reassure the market that Vitale's creative vision has secured support from the brand's new owner. In an April investor call, Prada management declined to comment on whether they were happy to find Versace in a trusted pair of hands under Vitale, who was previously design director at Miu Miu.

Vitale's departure created an unwelcome hiccup for Miu Miu at a time when the brand is powering Prada Group's top line. I'll be on the lookout for signs that the Prada-Bertelli clan have since patched things up with the designer.

## Bottega Veneta

Louise Trotter's vision for Bottega Veneta, set for Sept. 27, should be more fully realised. She's had time: The brand skipped the menswear season and didn't show anything for women's pre-fall either.

What remains to be seen is whether the brand will keep juggling its dual message of leather craft and top-end fashion innovation — a position it honed under predecessor Matthieu Blazy — or lean into its quieter, more commercial side (as suggested by recent brand campaigns).

I wouldn't want to be an nth brand trying to keep people excited about q\*\*\*t lux\*\*\*. But despite the hype under Blazy and Daniel Lee, Bottega Veneta barely sells its ready-to-wear, and might draw inspiration from the recent resilience of Loro Piana, Brunello Cucinelli and Zegna, whose crafty, commercial apparel continued to drive sales as luxury handbags sputtered.

## Jil Sander

Simone Bellotti steps up to the plate Sept. 24 at OTB's Jil Sander, fresh off a run at Bally that made him a darling of fashion critics. At Bally, he translated the brand's Swiss heritage into fashion with an eclectic medley of cultural and aesthetic references from pasturing cows to Dada.

What Bellotti's Jil Sander will look like, and how it lands commercially, is a wild card. OTB has been on a tear at Margiela, while its turnaround at flagship Diesel is clicking along. But translating respect from fashion insiders into sales has proven trickier at Jil Sander and Marni.

