



A battleground for reinvention: 5 takeaways from Milan Fashion Week

A fond farewell to Mr Armani and a new strategic vision across many of Milan's megahouses made for an emotional, dynamic season.

By Lucy Maguire



The Spring/Summer 2026 edition of Milan Fashion Week (MFW), which was dedicated to the late Giorgio Armani, culminated last night in a black-tie fond farewell for the designer, as the brand showcased his final collection on the runway. The event was held at the Pinacoteca di Brera museum, which just opened a retrospective on the late designer. Its central courtyard was covered with white lanterns, and models walked slowly, so guests could savour the last-ever collection designed by Mr Armani himself.

The loss loomed large over MFW. But this season was also one of new beginnings. Milan became a battleground of reinvention this season, with debuts from Demna at Gucci, Dario Vitale at Versace, Louise Trotter at Bottega Veneta and Simone Bellotti at Jil Sander, each taking a different approach to the big reveal, and outlining new priorities for their respective houses.

So what themes emerged? And what does it mean for Italian fashion? Here are our key takeaways.

Reality and relatability

There was a lot of talk of reality in Milan for SS26, perhaps as designers aim to address the challenging retail climate by reaching a broader consumer with more wearable clothes.

Dario Vitale's "audacious" Versace debut was quite the departure from Donatella Versace's high glamour, instead presenting a more wearable world of layered separates and denim, albeit in bold shades of blue, green, pink and yellow. "We make it a little more real," he told *Vogue Runway*'s Nicole Phelps, pre-show. "I have a lot of friends who would die to wear an embroidered leather vest, but to go to the disco club, not to go to the Met." The 200-capacity show was described as bold by almost every outlet. "It was a clean cut with the past," says *Vogue Runway*'s Tiziana Cardini. "Whether that is a good or a bad thing, it's too early to say."

Buyers seemed to think positively. "I'm already envisioning our client wearing that backless cut-out shirt paired with high-waisted pink denim next season," says Tiffany Hsu, buying director of Mytheresa and LuxExperience group venture officer. "It's that perfect balance of sensuality and empowerment."





While it was well received by many, the question is whether the prices will reflect the “realness” of the clothes.

Simone Bellotti’s well-received debut at Jil Sander also opted for realness, returning the house to its roots in ’90s minimalism, in contrast to the more experimental and extravagant work of former creative directors, including Luke and Lucie Meier (2017–2025) and Raf Simons (2005–2012). “We want it to be back to the real product,” said brand owner and OTB founder Renzo Rosso, post-show. Every buyer and editor I spoke with noted the show as a highlight, including *Vogue Runway*’s Cardini. “Perhaps he could add some more runway-ready visual highlights to the collection,” she notes, but that will likely come, as “summer is always lighter in terms of ideas.”

Other brands aimed for relatability beyond the clothes. On Tuesday, Diesel eschewed a traditional show, instead hosting a public egg hunt across Milan, which rivalled some of the week’s debuts in terms of press and media attention. Fifty-five looks, each encased in a transparent egg, were dotted around the city. Five thousand members of the public signed up to participate, and the first few people to find all the looks won a custom look by designer Glenn Martens for Christmas. “If we really want to be democratic, we should give the runway and the front row to the city of Milan,” Martens said backstage at a preview of the collection.

Cinematic moments

Often, fashion is an industry of dichotomies. And while many brands talked about reality, others dealt in fiction. The lines between fashion and cinema continue to blur as brands utilise film to launch their collections, and studios leverage fashion as a vehicle for promotion.

After releasing his first Gucci collection in the form of a lookbook titled *La Famiglia*, Demna further outlined his vision for the house with a film that was screened on Tuesday night. *The Tiger* was directed by Spike Jonze and Halina Reijn, with an A-list cast that included Demi Moore, Edward Norton, Elliot Page and Ed Harris, who all attended the intimate event. And while it wasn’t the major runway show we may have expected from Demna, the early morning collection drop certainly sparked a lot of conversation.

“Demna’s short film *The Tiger* also stood out — not just as a format, but as a masterstroke of storytelling,” says Mytheresa’s Hsu. “It perfectly conveyed his vision for Gucci: honouring heritage while setting the foundation for what’s next. Marketing genius.”

On Saturday, Dolce & Gabbana delivered one of the most memorable moments of the week, when Meryl Streep and Stanley Tucci attended the show in character as Miranda Priestly and Nigel from *The Devil Wears Prada*. They were filming a scene for *The Devil Wears Prada 2*, signalled by actress Simone Ashley sitting behind them atypically in the second row. “The energy in the room was electric,” says Jodi Kahn, SVP, brand partnerships and buying, women’s designer RTW for Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus. “It was an unforgettable blend of fashion and cinematic excitement.”

From Demna’s screening to Versace’s intimate, secretive show, different debut formats made for a varied season. “I think that it’s great that there is variety,” Cardini says. “Fashion needs that. We need different visions, consistency and variety. That makes fashion more attractive. Yes, we need some realistic propositions, but we also need different kinds of creativity [elsewhere].”

A focus on texture and craft

Louise Trotter’s debut at Bottega Veneta took place in Fabbrica Orobica. The format felt simpler than Bottega’s mega-shows, but it allowed guests to focus on the textures and craft. The collection featured plenty of dark tailoring, simple shirting and monochromatic looks, contrasted with dynamic, acid-bright,





fluffy coats that moved with the models, tinsel skirts made from metallic and burgundy threads, swishing with every step.

As industry insiders pointed out, Trotter is one of the few women designers designing at a major luxury house, and this was felt. “What I appreciated the most was that, despite the dramatic elements, the collection still felt understated and more feminine — a natural evolution for the brand,” says Kahn. The collection also heavily featured the brand’s intrecciato weave, which appears to be a strategic focus for the house lately. Last month, it opened an intrecciato pop-up in Harrods, where very important clients (VICs) could buy custom looks in the leather weave. At the show, many VICs sat in the front row in full intrecciato looks.

Prada, normally the crown jewel of Milan Fashion Week’s schedule, had a lot to compete with this season. But the brand stepped up to the plate with a large-scale show and post-show rave in the Fondazione Prada, with DJ sets from Jamie XX (guests spotted co-creative director Raf Simons on the dancefloor). “Brands like Prada, Tod’s and Missoni are trying to shed skin in a way. They are consistent without being boring or dusty,” Cardini says.

An injection of colour and fresh takes

Across minimalist and maximalist collections, a bright, contrasting colour palette ruled this season, even for houses more associated with dark palettes and clean lines, like MM6 Maison Margiela, which presented an uncharacteristically colourful collection. Bellotti’s Jil Sander featured a full palette of contrasting bright colours, at odds with the dark collections favoured by the brand founder. Fendi, Versace and Prada also played with contrasting colours, layering them on top of one another in unexpected ways. “This collection is about reacting to the uncertain — clothes that can shift, change, adapt,” said Miuccia Prada in a statement post-show.

The lingerie trend, which has endured for a few seasons, first with panties, then corsetry and bodysuits, has continued for SS26. Now, designers have turned their attention to the bra. Plunge and balconette bras made an appearance across many shows, including embellished ones at Jil Sander, colourful plunge bras at Fendi, loose, silk bras at Prada and lacy styles at The Attico.

In terms of new designers, all eyes were on Francesco Murano and Institution by Galib Gassanoff this season, both of whom were discovered by Fondazione Sozzani. Murano and Gassanoff presented their sophomore collections on schedule, each with their unique take on draping and fabrication. “We all know this is a very delicate moment, especially for emerging and smaller brands, but I’m satisfied and confident about the direction my brand is taking,” Murano said post-show. “It’s the result of years of work carried out with passion, dedication, and care. For me, it’s essential to build a solid foundation for the brand’s future.”

“While the overall mood this week included a lightness in fabrications and silhouettes, there was also a sense of nostalgia, youthfulness and romance woven throughout — all carried with a feeling of cautious optimism — despite the rainy weather!” Kahn says.

A path forward for Made in Italy

While the tone of this season felt optimistic, and industry insiders largely responded well to the debuts, it’s not all rosy in Milan. On Tuesday morning, Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana held an opening breakfast, where executives including OTB’s Renzo Rosso, Moncler’s Remo Ruffini, Max Mara’s Luigi Maramotti, Prada Group’s Lorenzo Bertelli and Zegna’s Gildo Zegna were candid about the challenges Italian fashion is facing today — from a slowdown in retail sales and store traffic to the ethical issues plaguing the Made in Italy supply chain. In the last 18 months, three of Milan’s most prominent luxury labels have been placed under judicial administration over concerns of unethical labour practices in their supply chains, from third-party suppliers.





While none of the brands affected were in the room, the executives assured journalists that the issue affects only a small portion of the supply chain for a small number of brands, and asked the press to continue to tell positive stories about fashion. However, Prada Group's Bertelli acknowledged that even if the issues affect a tiny percentage of the supply chain for certain brands in Italy, "that's too much".

In response, the CNMI has proposed a new legally binding third-party certification system to ensure compliance with labour and ethical standards across the Italian fashion supply chain. "This, for me, is a win from something that was not so good," CNMI president Carlo Capasa tells *Vogue Business*. He hopes it will provide a basis for new Europe-wide legislation. "We will probably be the first to have a supply chain that is completely monitored in terms of workers. And believe me, while we're talking about Italy today, this [illegal subcontracting] is happening everywhere in the world."

With many of Milan's brands moving into new eras, it's a good time for the Italian fashion industry to clean up behind the scenes as well.

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