

WELCOME BACK ALEXIS CARRINGTON

It was bound to happen sooner or later — power dressing a la 'Dynasty' hit the catwalks at Fashion Week. Expect the look in a store near you soon

BY SAMANTHA CRITCHELL
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PHOTO: REUTERS

audience wanting more after a glimpse of bareness from a back-closure keyhole opening or a slit on the back of a skirt.

There was very little that was overtly sexy — and that's what was so tantalizing: The clothes draped the models just the right way and were made of slinky-yet-sophisticated fabrics. Karan captured strength that has become a trend here, but there was also a womanliness that not every designer has embraced this season.

The crowd included White House social secretary Desiree Rogers, who had one of the best seats in the house next to *Vogue* Editor in Chief Anna Wintour.

CAROLINA HERRERA

While everyone else might be obsessed with the 1980s, Carolina Herrera looked to the decorative elements of the 18th century for the fall collection she debuted Monday.

And the copper hardware that mimicked those old architectural details added the most modern touches to the dominant fitted shape with a tight, high waist.

The mixing of textured silk, reflective jacquard, lace, suede and a recurring floral motif created a luxurious patchwork quilt, and she also created an eye-catching draped wrap with long sleeves that was worn over gowns, many of which had a corset peeking out from underneath.

CYNTHIA ROWLEY

The usually effervescent party girl in Cynthia Rowley's clothes went into mourning for the economy, showing up in black with I'm-too-over-worked-to-care hair.

The majority of the 1940s-inspired looks were entirely black, though Rowley kept it interesting by mixing textures in silk, velvet and leather dresses. Basket-weaved strips of black silk made wide Obi belts that offset stern black silk dresses.

The somber mood was only occasionally broken up by the few shots of electric blue, green, white, orange and blood red, which were sprinkled in through silk strips or accessories like giant bib necklaces.

Rowley drew design inspiration from women's shoulders.

Exaggerated structure created drama in conservative blouses and dresses where layers of folded silks resulted in huge princess sleeves.



PHOTO: AP



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BETSEY JOHNSON

Can't afford to have a fete in a recession? Throw a house party!

That's what designer Betsey Johnson did to show off her fall 2009 looks, unleashing a 25-piece collection inspired by food at her Manhattan showroom, recreated as an apartment.

The theme of the collection was snacks: knitted dresses and tops paired with fringe, sequins and layers of petticoats for frothy skirts resembling something Cyndi Lauper might have worn in the days of *Girls Just Wanna Have Fun*. And Johnson didn't settle on a morose color palette: her looks ran through colors like a rainbow.

JILL STUART

The sound track to Jill Stuart's fall runway show could have been *Leather and Lace*. The designer cited French singer Françoise Hardy as an influence, but it was hard not to see at least a little Stevie Nicks in the mix of billowy, sheer chiffon with tough-as-nails motorcycle leather.

The most dramatic and striking silhouettes were her more delicate looks, including a white mini-dress surrounded by cascading ruffles that turned sexy when it was backlit by the runway lights.

For the more hard-core rock 'n' roll girl, there were plenty of black skinny jeans and barely-there tops. And for everyone else, there were Stuart's short strapless dresses, the bread-and-butter of many of her collections.

TRACY REESE

Tracy Reese bounced between the boardroom, bedroom and boyfriend's closet for clothes that hit many of the trends emerging for fall without being a slave to them.

The aggressiveness that's been all over the catwalks was represented in Reese's show with wide shoulders and a bronze brocade outfit. Her prints, though, were artful, and her shapes softer than the sharp 1980s silhouette that is making a comeback.

Paris and Nicky Hilton were among those watching in the front row.

The collection was dedicated to her mother, who died last week.

Her front-row seat was empty save a bouquet of flowers that she normally would have handed to her daughter.

MISS SIXTY

Miss Sixty kicked off its show Sunday with a black, acid-wash denim romper with a low-slung waist with a chain detail, with a strapless acid-wash jumpsuit right on its heels.

Designer Wichy Hassan followed those looks up with nylon puffer pieces and a colorful pop-art print of fashion-magazine covers that was best used on a windbreaker that was worn with skinny jeans and a tank top covered in "peace" graphics.

Most of the jeans had the skinniest of legs, some looking painted on the models. The lower waist was in most instances refreshing, but the dropped-crotch trousers that almost hung to knees were silly and unflattering.

CALVIN KLEIN MENSWEAR

The new armor for the working man is made of molded foam, a fabric that repels anything you throw at it.

Calvin Klein menswear designer Italo Zucchelli used this fabric for modern-day Michelin-man suits worn as if were just another day at the office.

Of course the Calvin Klein way is to send a powerful message using understated style, so Zucchelli introduced this fashion-forward, futuristic look in basic shades of gray and they were woven into the larger fall collection, which was mostly slim, monochromatic two-button suits offered in gray-black-taupe colors named anthracite, vapor and zinc.

ERIN FETHERSTON

A first glance at Erin Fetherston's mini hoop skirts renders a verdict of cute-but-not-wearable. However, when the designer herself wore a black version of this kooky teacup silhouette, she looked pretty darned cute.

The theme of Fetherston's show on Sunday was life-size dolls, complete with girly bows and Swiss-dot gloves. The collection, dubbed *Tinderbox*, was gimmicky, but there was something fresh in the unabashed femininity, which has been a rare sight at the previews of fall styles.

Fetherston embraced delicate tops in chiffon, ruffled necklines and a floral print of a magnolia blossom. She also used a delicate lavender and a rich cranberry color to break up all the black and white.



PHOTO: EPA

Remember the 1980s, when big hair and even bigger shoulders were the height of chic? The designers at Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week won't let you forget. Yes, the shoulder pad is back. Add that to power suits, Robert Palmer-style second-skin dresses, dark lipstick and even, at Miss Sixty, acid-wash jeans. It's probably safe to say that there were more shoulder pads at Goodwill drop-off bins than at fashion boutiques in recent years.

But big shoulders edged onto the runways of Marc Jacobs, Donna Karan, Alexander Wang, Diane von Furstenberg and others as New York Fashion Week ended its fourth day of fall previews Monday.

"Shoulder pads scare people but remember, runway is a fairy tale," said Gloria Baume, fashion director at *Teen Vogue*. "Now we have to figure out how to make it real."

Done right, though, sharp shoulders can give a new confidence to women left weary by the economy, said Stephanie Solomon, Bloomingdale's fashion director. "Toughness is confidence. It's a way of saying, 'You can't bring me down.'" Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week runs through Friday.

MARC JACOBS

Marc Jacobs' punk princess was the prom queen with a rebellious streak, the one who wears oversized cardigans with zipper details and a series of tight pencil skirts. She has a few outfits with sexy cutouts and a black, slashed dress that allows flashes of pink and green to peek through.

And, of course, she has the biggest shoulder pads of the week.

Jacobs is considered to be one of the most influential designers in New York, if not the most influential, so be ready for copycat satin party dresses in hot pink, purple, blue and green in every mall later this year.

Far fewer fashionistas saw the Jacobs show than normal — and the paparazzi missed the typical parade of stars — because the designer cut back the guest list significantly and started the show even before the appointed time on the invitation.

DONNA KARAN

There's more to seduction than skin and sin. Donna Karan's smoldering fall looks left the