

New generation fires up London Fashion Week

London lived up to its reputation with a traditionally strong mix of classic tailoring and funky fashion, as established labels and new talent battled for attention on the catwalks

BY ALICE RITCHIE
AFP, LONDON

London Fashion Week, which gave the world John Galiano, Alexander McQueen and Hussein Chalayan, is 25 years old this year but still providing a platform for the next generation of designers.

Christopher Kane, Marios Schwab, Louise Goldin and Danielle Scutt, some just a few years out of graduate school, more than held their own against established names such as Vivienne Westwood, Paul Smith and Betty Jackson.

The place to watch for fresh talent is the Central Saint Martins graduate show, which took place Friday with a playful and experimental display of 18 young designers who played with shapes, volumes and a wide variety of fabrics.

But it is those who are on the verge of making it on the global stage — and who are being funded this year by the British Fashion Council — who are causing the most excitement here.

"It's the ones who are coming through who are just amazing because as well as being creative designers they create with the actual materials they're using. They're actually making things from scratch," Hilary Alexander, the fashion editor of the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper, said on Monday.

The much-feted Christopher Kane delivered a clean cut collection that used strips of velvet to create geometrical lines in organza dresses, in a palette that moved from cream to increasingly bold throughout the show.

Louise Goldin, who came to attention in 2005,

created a stunning line of clothes using leather patches in strong shapes against soft fabrics and a tiled effect of material on material to create definition.

There were rough wool jackets with fur sleeves, and space age leather structured corsets and belts contrasted with soft skirts and trousers.

Marios Schwab, a Saint Martins graduate and best new designer at the British Fashion Awards in 2006, also played with shape with sculpted dresses in hot pink and in white, cocooned inside voluminous garments of identical fabric.

Black tunics were slashed at the neck and hip to display crystals underneath, much as rocks crack to reveal their hidden crystal treasures, a natural phenomenon that also inspired Graeme Black's collection this season.

The palette grew over the show, from black to three dimensional graphic prints in cyan and red incorporated in blocks onto black cloth, and burst into color by the end with a fuchsia dress with an external bust support.

Erdem, the label set up by Erdem Moralioglu in 2005, is another new generation designer receiving funding from the council, and fused sharp tailoring with romanticism for a luxurious collection dominated by florals.

There were flowers embroidered onto simple shifts, applied in lace or in black crystals at the base of a dress with a puffball skirt, tightly packed into prints, or created out of layers of material stitched to replicate petals.

Fellow NewGen designer Danielle Scutt espoused traditional elegance for sexy, rock 'n' roll look with

skin-tight dresses and trousers slit with lines of zips to reveal bare flesh, and bodycon shifts with rips into patterned fabric.

She mixed bold shapes and colors, with black pencil skirt suits embellished with bright red fire-like shapes on the lapels and pockets, and a corset of black leather set with a red silk breast plate.

Across town, Modernist, who formed in 2005, decided this year to keep off the runway in favor of an exotic-themed exhibition just off Carnaby Street.

The collection was all black, but the design duo explored contrasts with crocodile skin mixed with cashmere, silk and elastic and finished off with ostrich feathers and human hair.

But while there is clearly no shortage of talent, the question is whether it will stay in London. The pull of New York and Paris is strong, even for those who have only taken their first steps in the British capital.

Kumiko Watari's migh-T collection of brightly printed oversized T-shirt dresses was part of the Vauxhall Fashion Scout — another source of funding for new talent — One to Watch show on Friday night.

"For young designers it's a good place to start out," she says of London, but adds: "I want to show in Paris because there are more buyers."



Doldrums ahead of stunted Milan Fashion Week

Designers have reacted to the credit crunch by economizing or pulling out of fashion week altogether

AFP, MILAN

Milan Fashion Week opens today in an atmosphere of gloom and doom with some 10 fewer shows in the lineup because of the global financial crisis.

While 95 fashion houses staged shows a year ago, this year's program has attracted only 79. A total of 93 brands showed their summer 2009 collections here in September of last year.

"There are about 10 fewer fashion shows," the head of the Chamber of Fashion, Mario Boselli, admitted to reporters on the sidelines of a news conference presenting Fashion Week.

Some couturiers are responding to "signs of caution" from buyers planning to skip the shows, Boselli said. "They're trying to economize."

Recalling that men's collections were shown in January "in a crisis atmosphere with 20 percent fewer shows," Boselli insisted that "all the big fashion names" are in the women's lineup — such as Giorgio Armani, Moschino, Gucci, Fendi and Versace.

The small fashion houses that are staying away meanwhile balk at admitting financial difficulties.

La Perla, a well-known lingerie brand that launched its ready-to-wear line in 2002, spoke of "strategic and not economic reasons," while AB Soul admitted that its absence was "more or less linked to budget cuts."

The Italian clothing sector — including textiles, leather, shoes and so on — has been hard hit by the downturn, raising the alarm last week over falling orders and appealing to the government for aid such as that enjoyed by the auto sector.

"For the past month and a half, all orders have been blocked," said Michele Tronconi, president of Italy's Textile and Fashion Federation. "The situation is explosive."

Italy accounts for between 20 percent and 25 percent of the European textiles and clothing sector, he said, adding that the industry employs some 500,000 people in Italy and has a turnover of nearly US\$69 billion.

"We estimate that our sector by itself will account for US\$12.5 billion worth of Italy's trade surplus [in the sector]," he said.

The economic development ministry has called a "round-table" tomorrow for textile and clothing representatives.

The big guns in Italian fashion seem to be largely spared by the crisis so far.

Giorgio Armani last week inaugurated a huge "concept store" covering 4,000m² on New York's Fifth Avenue.

Even so, "King" Giorgio told the Italian daily *La Repubblica*: "I didn't feel like celebrating [the inauguration] with caviar. You can't really, these days."

Florentine designer Roberto Cavalli, for his part, has announced a new five-floor store opening March 7 on Paris' chic Faubourg Saint-Honore.

"It's probably crazy while we're going through this crisis," he told *La Stampa*. "But I was really keen on it. It's been my dream."



Innovation and tradition go hand-in-hand at London Fashion Week. PHOTOS: AGENCIES