

# STYLE

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## Paris Fashion Week blooms with colorful gowns from Dior

*John Galliano's big-budget show was a riotous celebration of haute couture at its best*

BY JENNY BARCHFIELD  
AP, PARIS

Paris was in full bloom on Monday, as Christian Dior designer John Galliano opened the city's fall-winter 2011 haute couture collections with a hothouse of petal-covered gowns and tulip shaped skirts in a riot of colors.

A marvel of technical know-how and unbounded creativity, Galliano's garden was a sort of haute couture manifesto that put on very ostentatious display the raison d'être behind the collections of wildly expensive, made-to-measure garments that only a handful of women in the world can afford. As the number of houses that still produce couture continues to dwindle — with smaller labels that are unable to shoulder the cost not fielding collections this season — the Dior show was a riotous celebration of what couture, at its best, can be.

Bouchra Jarrar delivered clean-lined looks in blue, black and ecru for her second couture collection under her signature label.

Where Dior was an explosion, Jarrar was all self-restraint and rigor — but her elegance and precision were no less couture than Dior's creative catharsis.

Another emerging French designer, Christophe Josse, looked to the long, lean silhouettes of the early 19th century for inspiration, delivering a nuanced collection in dusty-hued silks, velvets, astrakhan and feathers. As with Jarrar, there was nary a sequin in sight.

Lebanon's Georges Chakra made up for that, pouring kilograms of sparkles onto red-carpet-ready gowns in glimmering metallic fabrics.

At Adeline Andre, technicians in white lab coats peeled layer after onion-like layer off one model, assembling what the carrot-topped designer called "suspension dresses" — something like multicolored silk nighties with abbreviated silk panels like midriff tops held at varying lengths by extra-long spaghetti straps — onto other models. Held in a two-room gallery in central Paris, the bare-bones show-cum-performance piece was at the opposite end of the spectrum from big-budget extravaganzas like Dior's. But what it lacked in financial punch, the Andre show made up for it heart.

For his capsule collection — shown on mannequins during a presentation at Paris pastry house Angélique — Alexis Mabile looked to the south of France, showing about half a dozen lace-heavy looks soaked in the primary colors and Catholic culture of Provence. The hottest of the sun-baked looks included a skirtsuit in torero red lace and a feminine tuxedo with a pretty pink shirt.

At the end of Day One, the fashion glitterati migrated to the Chanel Jewelry boutique at the nearby Place Vendôme, where Russian ballerina dancers mimed about among the glass-topped display cases as the champagne-downing, blini-chomping crowd looked on.

Paris' haute couture shows moved into day two yesterday with Giorgio Armani's Armani Prive label and storied French house Givenchy, which opted against a runway show and displayed the collection to clients and the press in private appointments at its Paris showroom. The label said concerns about the privacy of the clients — the handful of women rich enough to afford couture gowns with price tags approaching that of a nice new car — was behind the decision.

### DIOR

Galliano is a man of many skills. Beyond his brilliance as a designer, he's got erudition, strut and attitude to spare. But a green thumb? Galliano's just someone you wouldn't peg as being a master gardener.

But his immaculately tended flower garden of a show proved the contrary — at least metaphorically.

Full ballerina skirts in baby pink tulle shook like wind-rustled roses, and a rainbow of applique petals in featherlight chiffon enveloped the nip-waisted Bar jackets.

Galliano also fielded cocktail dresses in cream and navy Delft porcelain print, with upside-down tulip shaped skirts in Ceylon blue. Sheath dresses in mohair and boucle were a like a field of wildflowers in bloom. The ballgowns were massive concoctions of petal-shaped tulle, chiffon and droopy lengths of silk — one hand-painted with an oversized peony.

The models — their eyes and lips blooming with rich jewel tones — wore cones of colored cellophane, like a bouquet wrapping, on their undulating upswept hairdos.

"I loved it, I want to be every flower in Galliano's garden," actress Jessica Alba said in a backstage interview. Other A-list guests at Monday's show — held in a tent in the garden of the Rodin Museum

— included Jared Leto and "Gossip Girl" Blake Lively, who covered his collection notes with little sketches of each passing outfit. A future fashion editor, perhaps? Galliano, a British eccentric who each season delivers inspired reinterpretations on the luxury supernova's storied classic looks, looked to the house's late, great founder's tulip line for inspiration for Monday's sumptuous collection.

### BOUCHRA JARRAR

For a haute couture collection — where sequins are practically de rigeur — the Jarrar show was remarkably short on bling. Slim panels of gold lame were the only things that shone on the collection, a tour de force of understated elegance.

Jarrar, a relative newcomer to the rarified world of Paris' made-to-measure couture collections, delivered clean-lined sheath dresses with plunging V-necklines and pretty cap sleeves. Short dresses had cutaway vents that exposed a swath of skin or a hidden panel of gold lame. Dramatic V-shaped gold necklaces gave a touch of drama to the graphic collection.

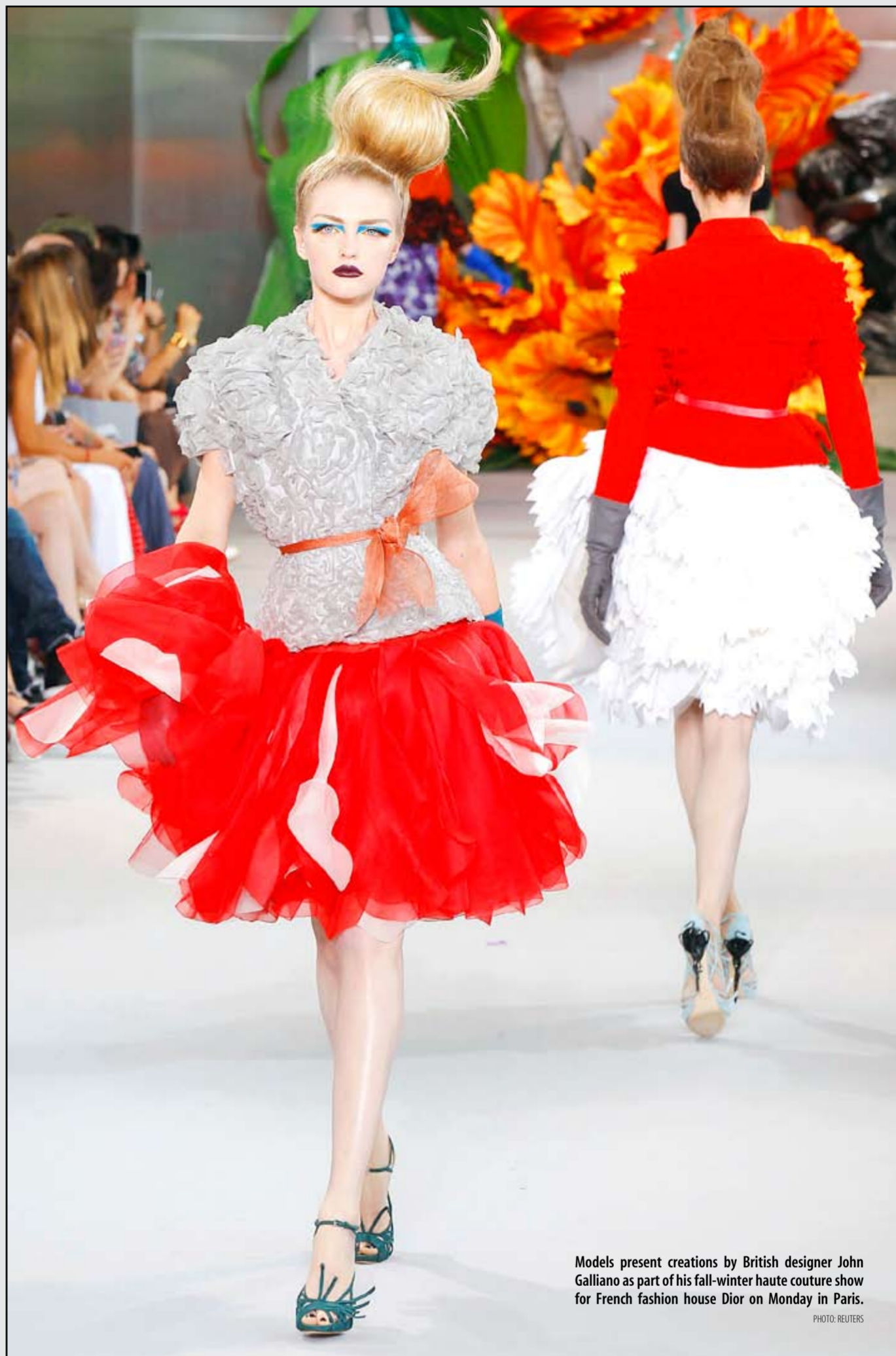
In a Spartan palette of ecru, navy and black, the collection felt like it was channeling a crisp, updated Coco Chanel.

Jarrar, who cut her teeth at Balenciaga, said that, despite the show's vaguely 1920s feeling, she hadn't been inspired by any era in particular.

"Really, my only inspiration is the world outside me, the women who surround me," said Jarrar, who showed her debut couture collection under her signature label last season. "I tried to create a sort of ideal wardrobe with all the elements women now need." Mission accomplished.



A model presents a creation by Bouchra Jarrar during the designer's fall-winter haute couture collection show on Monday for Paris Fashion Week. PHOTO: AFP



Models present creations by British designer John Galliano as part of his fall-winter haute couture show for French fashion house Dior on Monday in Paris. PHOTO: REUTERS

### ALEXANDRE VAULTIER

Wonder Woman got a hard-edged makeover, swapping her unitard for sheath dresses with plunging V necklines and dangling sleeves that were today's super-heroine's answer to the cape.

Vauthier, another rising talent who's attracted A-list fans including Rihanna, served up dresses black, white and purple knit jersey, punctuated by wide gold belts and cuffs. From sharp, square shoulders dangled long ultra-long sleeves that, slit all the way up their undersides, swung with an I'm-about-to-save-the-world kind of jauntiness.

Plunging Vs were everywhere, vamping up the sheath dresses and heating up a turtleneck dress in clingy knit with a sexy, triangular cutout panel at the bust. One dress in graphic black and white was made from two oversized triangular panels, with the model literally sewn between the two.

Vauthier — who is showing on the margins of the prestigious haute couture displays despite being widely seen as among Paris' brightest young lights — lived up to his superheroic reputation with Monday's collection.

### GEORGES CHAKRA

There's no missing the Chakra woman. In body-hugging goddess gowns in metallic fabrics bedazzled with sequins and rhinestones, the Lebanese designer's girl could inadvertently blind you from a mile away.

Chakra looked to old-school Hollywood glamour for his collection of high-shine looks that were all but begging for the red carpet.

He served up nip-waisted cocktail dresses with strands of white sequins that swayed and jangled as the models walked and bustier gowns in bronze lame with mermaid tails and oversized plum-colored bows — gowns, in short, that almost uncannily resembled the Oscar statuettes they were meant for receiving.

"It's like watching those old black and white movies from old-time Hollywood, but this time it's in color," Chakra said in a pre-show interview. And what color. The asymmetrical cocktail dresses shone darkly in iridescent emerald, prune and maroon, and jewel tone silks shone beneath swishy panels on some of the lame dresses.

Refrains from the *Mad Men* soundtrack and the Radiohead song *No Surprises* played over and over, and both were a kind of shorthand for a collection. Steeped in the kind of classy glamour that has become Chakra's calling card, the lovely collection stayed in familiar territory, presenting, as it were, no surprises at all.

Models presents creations from the fall-winter haute couture collections of, clockwise from right, Atelier Gustavovins, Anne Valerie Hash and Eva Minge on Monday in Paris. PHOTOS: EPA

