

# Move over skinny jeans, denim goes wide for spring

Shift in shape comes after two years of skinny dominance, while other spring styles tinker with safe formulas

BY ALEXANDRIA SAGE  
REUTERS, LAS VEGAS

A "skinny" tag hangs on a pair of denim jeans on display at a store in New York.

PHOTO: BLOOMBERG



Women who hate skinny jeans can rejoice this spring when the extra-tight denim that has dominated the market for more than two years makes way for wide-leg cuts.

Bell-bottoms and boot-cut styles will appear in US stores this spring. Many apparel watchers predict the eventual demise of the skinny that has spurred both adoration and revulsion.

"The pendulum is swinging away from skinny," said Ryan Dziadul, a spokesman for VF Corp's 7 For All Mankind. "There are millions of pairs out there. For spring, it's about bell-bottoms."

Wider-leg jeans made an appearance last week at the Magic apparel trade show, the twice-annual Las Vegas pilgrimage where retail buyers place orders for the newest looks.

Jeans makers are looking for something new to

entice shoppers who have proven scarce at the check-out line since the recession.

The move comes as jeans as a category will lessen in importance this spring, experts said. Khakis and corduroy pants are expected to steal the focus, said vendors.

True Religion Brand Jeans is increasing the amount of non-denim apparel in its line to between 30 percent to 40 percent, from about 5 percent last year.

"Denim has slowed down dramatically. She doesn't want to buy more jeans," said Oscar Feldenkreis, president and chief operating officer of Perry Ellis, speaking of the female shopper. "And the jeggings trend has slowed down."

Jeggings, or leggings designed to emulate the tightest jeans, have been popular this past year across a variety of retailers, from high-end Bloomingdale's to discount Wal-Mart Stores.

Despite the trends shifting to a wider look, some

retailers are nervous so vendors will continue to make skinny and other styles to offer a range of options, jeans makers said.

"[Retailers] are seeing it in the trend reports, they're very curious, but they're not really booking it heavily yet," said Hala Jbara, director of marketing for Pepe Jeans. "They're more willing to try boot cuts."

#### SQUEAL-WORTHY?

That fear of the unknown is also evident in a wealth of recycled styles on display on the trade show floor where distressed leggings and tops, military-inspired pants and jackets or the ubiquitous graphic T-shirt jockey for attention.

"We're seeing silhouettes we saw last year," said Holly Valdez, co-owner of a Costa Mesa, California boutique. "They're playing it safe, but changing it up a bit."

A graphic T-shirt this spring may have an uneven hem

or an Army-inspired top might now have ruffles, adding a feminine twist to a harder-edge look.

But these details don't hide the lack of innovation in fashion.

"There's really nothing overwhelmingly new," said Eric Beder, analyst at Breaun Murray Carret. "Yes, there's a tweak here or there, but the women's business is moving at a glacial pace."

And given the conservatism in the market, many buyers have been placing orders for immediate delivery, rather than predict how trends will play out in the spring.

"I'd rather buy right now. I don't know what they [shoppers] will want in six months," said April Bullock, a buyer who owns two stores in Mississippi.

Bullock said apparel brands were overplaying the military trend, but that others inspired a second look.

"We've squealed a few times," she said. "Fringe is big. It makes us squeal."

## New Bayreuth festival manager divides Wagnerians

Richard Wagner's great-granddaughter Katharina Wagner is taking on the purists at opera's most exclusive festival — and trying to exorcise its Nazi past

BY KATE CONNOLLY  
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

Wotan, father of the gods, has just kissed his daughter, Brunnhilde, to sleep and left her to burn alive. Katharina Wagner raises her eyebrows as she smacks her lips around an ice cream, and looks on in satisfaction at the sea of 20,000 people who have gathered on Bayreuth's carnival ground to watch a live transmission of *The Valkyrie* on a huge screen. "I think we've pulled it off," she says.

Dressed in jeans and polo shirt, the attire of the co-chief of Germany's Bayreuth festival could hardly be in starker contrast to that of the high society event's standard dress code. But then Wagner neither looks nor behaves as you might imagine the head of one of the world's most talked-about cultural institutions to, or even the great-granddaughter of composer Richard Wagner.

It is clear that Wagner feels more at home here at the public viewing — one of the innovations that has characterized her young tenure so far and with which she has taken on the powerful Bayreuth establishment — than hobnobbing with the great and good. "The people are down to earth here. I feel at home," says the 32-year-old in her characteristic deep, gravelly voice. "I hope very much that the public viewing will be seen as my contribution to the festival, as an attempt to make it less stuffy, and elite, more open and transparent."

This is no mean goal. Bayreuth is one of the most conservative festivals in the

world, for which you can wait 10 years to secure a ticket: this year, for the 54,000 tickets there were 408,000 applications from more than 80 countries. The festival is seen by legions of fans as a sacred shrine to Richard Wagner, who set it up to showcase his works 134 years ago. These Wagnerians are deeply divided over Katharina, who after a long family battle, but with the staunch backing of her father Wolfgang, took over the helm last summer together with Eva, 33 years her senior. "The feeling of Wagnerians towards her oscillates between holy veneration and calling for a witch hunt," says *Die Welt's* cultural commentator, Lucas Wiegmann.

This is the first time the sisters have been completely on their own, following the death of their father in March. Poignantly, his seat in the Festspielhaus, where he watched no fewer than 1,300 performances, has been cordoned off out of respect. "I feel Dad's absence in every nook and cranny of Bayreuth," says Katharina. "But he's also constantly there with me, whispering in my ear, 'You're doing a good job, girl.'"

The sense that a new era has begun is palpable. At the free public viewing, locals — 70 percent of whom admitted in a recent survey they had never seen a Wagner opera — are invited to watch high culture while devouring sausages, beer and pretzels. There is also a kinder opera, now in its second year, in which a Wagner work — this year it was *Tannhauser* — is condensed to a more digestible and child-friendly format. The sisters have tried to shift the



power away from the traditionalists by setting up a new team of "active festival patrons" to encourage more transparency and artistic freedom, and less bureaucracy. The move is risky, as the traditionalists, who make up the Society of the Friends of Bayreuth, control much of the festival's funding. "I don't want Wagner just to be for people who have a lot of money," says Katharina. "It should be for everyone. When I'm told I'm killing the myth due to my podcasts, live streams, or television transmissions, I'm really sorry, but the myth is the work itself. Nothing can destroy that. The myth is Richard. End of story."

The festival has had a troubled history. Thanks to Hitler's love of Wagner and

his close friendship with then-director Winifred Wagner (the Welsh-born wife of Siegfried, and Wolfgang's mother), the festival enjoyed a fair amount of artistic independence under the Third Reich. It is also rumored that Winifred and Hitler, whom she called Wolf, were lovers. So another of Katharina's initiatives has been the setting up of an independent historical commission to investigate the unanswered questions about the festival's Nazi connections.

"I, for one, am personally interested about the extent to which the family was involved [with the party] on an individual basis," she says. "I want to find out more about my grandmother's fascination for this man, which lasted right up until the end of her life. But

The late Bayreuth festival chief Wolfgang Wagner is kissed by his daughter Katharina Wagner in July 2008 at the Festspielhaus in the southern German city of Bayreuth.

PHOTO: AFP

was she his lover? I don't know, I wasn't in the bedroom."

Katharina was prepared for this role from an early age. "At one point when I was about 20, my father asked me whether I could imagine taking on the job. I said 'yes.' I could imagine it, but it wasn't like I absolutely had to do it." She studied theater in Berlin, and staged her first opera, *Die Meistersinger*, at Bayreuth in 2007. The production was booted for some of its more outlandish features (statues of Beethoven and Mozart boasting erect plastic penises, for instance) by many of the die-hards — one even threw a cushion at her. But it convinced her father that Katharina was capable of assuming the role.

She says she will never get used to the Wagner fanatics, however, some of whom she finds "rather scary." Some even ask for locks of her trademark blond mane. "When I brush my hair, the stray strands end up in the waste paper basket, just like anyone else's," she says.

Turning up last weekend to introduce her pet project, the children's opera, her long glittery nails and large diamante hoop earrings flashing in the sun, Katharina passionately outlines her mission to win a new generation of Wagner enthusiasts. "It's our duty to the world of opera. We have to be actively recruiting new opera lovers as it's no good if they have to wait for 10 years

for tickets," she says. "And after all, Richard was all for making the festival more accessible."

After the one-hour production of *Tannhauser*, the nine-to-15-year-old Booz siblings Olivia, Carolin, Marvin and Deborah, from Bayreuth, rave about the characters, particularly the punky skateboard-riding Venus. "It's our first time at a Wagner opera," says Deborah. "I'd thought it would be boring, but it was great fun." They disappear to a tent to try on costumes, talk to the singers and experiment with smoke and foam machines.

At the entrance, a group of self-confessed hardcore fans who have dropped in to survey the opera for themselves deliver a damning verdict. "Patronizing and belittling to Wagner," says one. "Let the people have Wagner in its entirety or not at all."

It's at moments like these, says Katharina, that she feels like getting in her car and escaping the claustrophobic confines of Bayreuth — which has been described outside festival time as having half the number of inhabitants of New York's main cemetery, but being twice as dead — to the openness and freedom of her beloved Berlin.

Tellingly, her favorite place during the five-week festival is a motorway service station cafe on the outskirts of Bayreuth, which overlooks the autobahn to Berlin — and where it is highly unlikely she will be discovered by a Wagner fan. "I love sitting here drinking a coffee," she says, "and dreaming of escape."