

From left to right: Fall 2021 collections of Lanvin, Prada, Del Core.



FASHION

# Are the Next Roaring Twenties Around the Corner?

● The return of dressing up as seen in the fall 2021 collections suggested that another round of Roaring Twenties are approaching, yet they will be less about the glitz and more about conscious consumption.

BY SANDRA SALIBIAN

**MILAN** — Get ready for the roar.

As Miuccia Prada put it best after unveiling Prada's fall 2021 collection in February, "a new energy, a new desire is mounting."

This optimism, which the designer and co-creative director Raf Simons conveyed in a charming and sophisticated range, was shared by many of their peers, as a new sense of excitement ran through the collections presented across London, Milan and Paris.

Imagining better days ahead, away from restrictions and closer to resuming social gatherings, inspired designers to dare again and play with sequins, crystals, embroideries, vibrant colors and maxi volumes. The return of dressing up suggested a collective wish for another round of Roaring Twenties.

Not coincidentally, references to 1920s silhouettes and neo-flapper aesthetics in rich fluid fabrics, sequins, rhinestone embellishments and swinging hems abounded for fall. Examples ranged from Prada and Miu Miu to Lanvin and Paco Rabanne, with different takes also seen at Dries Van Noten, Sportmax, Rokh and Dundas.

But the resurgence of occasion wear transcended nods to the Jazz Age's fashion codes and embraced interpretations conveying the same desire to party, to go out and, most importantly, to see and be seen again.

"Revenge hemlines [miniskirts] are another key indicator that tap into this new era of glam and go along with the belief that rising hemlines signal optimism ahead," said Melissa Moylan, vice president,

creative director for women's wear at trend forecasting firm Fashion Snoops.

"While it's true that minis never quite went away, midi and maxi hemlines have dominated for some time. A minidress or skirt screams 'going out' and it's sure to resonate with the young contemporary consumer." Cue to Saint Laurent's miniskirts banded in faux fur, Dsquared2 minidresses and Valentino's new, super-short proportions.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, designers satiated the craving for attention with big volumes, often splashed with bright colors and bold patterns, as seen at Del Core's eccentric and convincing runway debut, as well as at Marni and Roksanda.

For Loewe, Jonathan Anderson delivered a beautiful collection that was all about "putting in the effort," in which he combined cocoon coats and drop-waist dresses evoking the 1920s with more maximalist options in psychedelic colors.

Emanuela Mora, professor of sociology of culture and communication at the department of political and social sciences of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, noted this resurgence in dressing up and compared the fashion industry to a swinging pendulum, currently trying to strike a balance between a progressive simplification of aesthetics and representation of reality on one end, and the longing to inspire lavish and dreamy images on the other.

"[Fashion] has shifted its focus from the aspirational dimension to the representation of reality," said Mora. "A growing trend per se, this was particularly prevalent this past year in which we couldn't see the aspirational horizons, and couldn't even afford to see them out of respect for the general climate and the suffering around us. But it is clear that for an institution like fashion that has its deepest roots in the dream, to lose this dimension completely would be a big problem."

Yet it would be reductive to assume the 2020s are on the verge of roaring just based on fashion indications. A century ago, the way of dressing was just

a reflection of the significant changes in lifestyle caused by transformations in the social, political and cultural context. Many elements contributed to the vibrant energy of that era and its economic and creative prosperity, from the unprecedented industrial growth to the acceleration of the movie industry, the blossoming of new dances and jazz music as well as the peak of Art Deco, among others.

So it's no surprise that designers put a heightened attention on dancing (see Dries Van Noten's video), choice of music and of location, further conveying the promising spirit of renaissance. While collaborations with DJs and references to the world of dance surged — Plastikman aka Richie Hawtin soundtrack for the Prada video, for one — brands additionally tapped iconic venues.

From Valentino staging its show at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan to Chanel presenting its sparkly party outfits at nightclub Castel and Loewe opting for the Le Train Bleu restaurant in Paris, these choices both signaled optimism and triggered nostalgia.

The desire to partake into celebrations, social interactions and to attract attention will always be relevant for society and didn't go completely numb even during the past year, when the seeds for a possible Roaring 20s were planted. At a century's distance, history seems to be repeating itself, as technological innovations disrupted most industries, civil activism called into question the establishment and more restricted fashions were abandoned in favor of relaxed shapes. The cultural conversations simply moved from Parisian cafés to Clubhouse, and TikTok got everybody in a dancing fever (even if a Charleston challenge has yet to go viral.)

So will the 2020s really turn into a round of Roaring Twenties 2.0?

Moylan believes so. "It's not often that the world experiences something that unifies everyone like the pandemic did. While every nation faced it in different waves, the abrupt stop of life as we know it is deeply felt on a global level, and likewise afterward we will eventually reach a point of economic prosperity like the Roaring Twenties," she said.

For Moylan, this quest for improvement encompasses cultural changes, as "we are working through social movements that will hopefully lead us to equality and liberation of oppressed BIPOC communities."

WGSN head of women's wear Sara Maggioni also thinks the comparison between the two eras is fair due to their similarities, as both are "about coming out of a dark period also thanks to new technologies and innovations."

"They are about embracing optimism, change and progress, challenging the status quo and seeking new ways to disrupt systems — which is very much what happened then, with women finding a newfound freedom for example, and what's happening now as we move toward more decentralized solutions and new, diverse voices are coming to the fore. There is that palpable feeling of wanting to live again, of improving one's life," said Maggioni.

"Back then, the use of cars revolutionized the world and this time we will likely see a renewed interest in the ability to travel once again," said Moylan, adding that wardrobes will need to be suited for this purpose again.

To this end, just like sportswear became a part of mainstream fashion for the first time in the 1920s, the casualization trend will continue to be a driving force, after comfort clothes became the norm for over a year and as many people continue working from home in the future.

"That said, when the time comes, consumers will want to get dressed up in a way that they hadn't before the pandemic. The consumer mentality before was centered around one-wear purchases whereas now, having sustained from occasion dressing for a while, there will be a greater emotional connection to fashion as a mood booster," said Moylan.

According to her, this doesn't necessarily have to implicate the use of over-the-top embellishments but could simply be channeled through vibrant hues. "The term 'dopamine dressing' illustrates this by wearing clothes that make us feel happy and bring us joy," she said, adding that she expects this "new world of glamour" to come into fruition especially for the holidays.

"Now, realistically, this doesn't mean that we'll all suddenly drop loungewear, comfortable clothes, practical styles in favor of party wear, structured tailoring and vibrant OTT looks," echoed ▶



Paco Rabanne, fall 2021

Maggioni. “Although there is a real desire for something different now and this will certainly result in some so-called ‘revenge shopping’ and people seeking something a bit more special, especially at the luxury level, of course we need to take into account all the wider implications,” she said.

In particular Maggioni referenced the attention to sustainability and consumers’ re-prioritizing their spending, underscoring that “a recessionary mind-set doesn’t favor outlandish styles but rather, a stealth wealth approach and value-driven product with great cost-per-wear appeal.”

“So essentially it will be a bit of a balancing act for brands, they will need to offer a bit of both: we’ll see our wardrobes diversifying as we have all grown quite tired of hoodies and sweatpants. We will see more color and print, some more statement pieces, soft tailoring and dresses will pick up again, but overall, aspects like comfort, practicality, hybrid styles and planet-friendly fabrics will carry on in a big way,” said Maggioni.

In the attempt to strike a balance, designers are looking at eveningwear also as separates, which “read as more approachable for those not quite ready to slip on a dress just yet,” said Moylan, who mentioned Del Core integrating tailored suits to his more extravagant looks and Markarian offering robe dresses, puff-sleeved tops and jacquard pieces as examples.

For Philip Fimmano, creative director of the Edelkooft Inc. trend forecasting company, the joy of dressing up has been expressed through the rediscovery of timeless accessories, such as gloves, turbans and hats. “Such gestures reflect the rejection of fast fashion and a return to classic style, which is actually a sustainable idea – getting to know the items in our wardrobe again and exploring different looks through variation and experimentation, be it online or IRL,” he said.

“As a counter response to staying home

in sweats and pajamas, soon we will welcome these garments back like old friends as we emerge from the current crisis, reviving the very act of dressing, role playing and creative styling,” continued Fimmano, who thinks that the greatest impact on this awakening will come from shots of vivid colors and pastels. He further forecasts that certain pre-pandemic items will no longer be relevant in the near future, with leggings, skinny jeans and ballerinas making way for fuller volumes and sturdier footwear.

So while some fashion elements from the 1920s will make a comeback, including less restrictive silhouettes and attention to craftsmanship, the over-the-top glam will be tempered in accordance to the current context. “The difference is that this time around, the glamour will be slightly toned down – think brushed metal and matte pearl versus gold bling and beading – reflecting a humbler shine of the times which is more in line with sustainability and the socially conscious post-corona landscape,” said Fimmano, noting that these concepts already induced most brands to scale down their assortments to focus on essentials.

Maggioni further contextualized the concept, acknowledging key differences between the two eras. While the 1920s were all about growth, with consumerism in its infancy, “nowadays, one of our biggest threats is climate change, which is actually the result of all that growth, so we are essentially collectively looking at de-growth and a more conscious approach to consumption.”

This would suggest that consumers’ need for fashion escapism might not necessarily translate into booming sales just yet. Further, “In terms of sentiment and morale, all of us feel a desire to escape right now and to dream about dressing up

as almost a matter of aesthetic hygiene... but unfortunately, what we’ve experienced this past year is a radicalization of [economic] inequality,” said Mora.

Even wealthy consumers, who haven’t been financially impacted as much by the pandemic and are now eager to spend again, might still be more considerate about shopping compared to pre-COVID-19 and “will scrutinize their purchases a lot more, asking themselves if they should buy something if they’ll only wear it once,” added Maggioni.

Going forward, creativity will have to adapt to this landscape, finding a middle ground between an extremely cautious and an over-the-top approach. According to Maggioni, the sweet spot will be filled with hybrid pieces, offering a more casual take on party wear and mixing wearable silhouettes with bold colors, sassy aesthetics with comfort, fun approach to fashion with commercial and seasonless shapes.

“It all goes back to that idea of decentralization and disrupting old systems to create new, more equal, diverse and positive ones. It’s a big challenge and as such, it should spark and fuel creativity,” continued Maggioni, underscoring that innovation thrives in times of crisis as people become more resourceful by acting out of intuition and necessity.

“It’s about unlearning and then learning again, with a fresh perspective...We are going through a bit of an experimental phase,” she added, identifying technology as the key to address certain challenges, especially the sustainable one.

There will be always demand for newness, even if customers are becoming increasingly mindful in their shopping, moving from disposable purchases to building wardrobes with investment pieces. To this end, according to Moylan, “designers

Dries Van Noten, fall 2021



and brands must also be conscious of not overproducing: Every item in a collection should have a reason and purpose, so no more 100-plus runway looks.”

For Fimmano, companies will have to rethink deadstock, as well as unrealistic pricing in the future. “While old-fashioned brands may attempt to get their markets back, the more conscious companies will reevaluate their definition of success, thriving on a smaller scale and growing at a slower pace while using their creativity to entice clients in alternative ways. Putting authentic values first, they will honor the making process, craftsmanship and quality, guiding customers to appreciate clothing on an entirely different level,” he concluded. ■



Loewe, fall 2021