

## Showing a lot, giving little

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Valerio Mezzanotti for *The New York Times*  
YVES SAINT LAURENT A leather bodysuit.

Something about the sight of all that pink and black at the Chanel show on Tuesday made you think of an all-day sucker, the greens saltwater taffy. And then the buxom blond model Lara Stone appeared in a sugary pink sweater dress, her faced pulled into a pout and her childlike beauty tools held in a molded clear plastic bag that looked more Mattel than Chanel. Has Karl Lagerfeld regressed?

This was a satisfying Chanel show with a lousy dessert. That's one way to characterize the split between the impeccable tailoring in black tweed and the insipidly sweet knitwear done in those boardwalk colors, with quilted purses, lipsticks and Chanel perfume bottles encased in the hard plastic typically used to sell Barbie's gear. Mr. Lagerfeld likes a good joke, but this one was too obvious for him.

As the Paris collections head to a close on Thursday, there's a weird sense of too much and not enough. Mr. Lagerfeld had too much merchandise on his runway, obscuring the smart-looking cuffed trousers and some terrific black day dresses cut close on the body, with a deep V-neck and a lanky dropped waist. (A similar style came in black leather.) And Stefano Pilati at Yves Saint Laurent showed some lovely shifts in Lycra-flecked gray flannel with a floaty back or a soft high collar. A charcoal pinstriped suit over a black leather bustier looked fresh.



Valerio Mezzanotti for *The New York Times*  
VALENTINO A wool day dress with a spray of pleating on the bodice.

But the Saint Laurent collection seemed to deny pleasure with an almost spinsterish disapproval registered in white cotton blouses and chic but drab gray pencil skirts. The opening leather pieces, including a bustier shown with just heels, promised seduction, as did the models' red mouths and leatherbound topknots. But there was finally no payoff. The collection seemed under pressure to be clear — rather than a little complex, a little vulgar. And Saint Laurent should feel voluptuous in its appetites, not starved and empty.

Mr. Lagerfeld's obvious reference was a famous photograph of Coco Chanel in a ruffled white collar, a motif he used throughout the collection. In fact, all the frilly collars and cuffs are detachable ("They get dirty," Mr. Lagerfeld said before the show). Black tweed jackets and coat-dresses projected a sharp silhouette — that was the message here — and some of the wool dresses had bars of green and white tweed on the pockets and cuffs.



*Valerio Mezzanotti for The New York Times*

*GIAMBATTISTA VALLI A silk peasant blouse and a wool midi-skirt, with matching boots.*

Soft ringlets of hair spilled out from the oversize boaters, and under the models' black-rimmed eyes were tiny silver sequins applied by the makeup artist Peter Philips. Amassed on their hands were abstract rings with green and pink jade. A green jade ring was engineered into the heels of black platform shoes. As for evening, the best looks were black, off-the-shoulder and lightly transparent over glossy black tights.

Virginie Mouzat, writing in *Le Figaro* on Tuesday, said that if there is a young Marie-Hélène de Rothschild, she would like Giambattista Valli's clothes. Well, maybe. Time and twittering seem to be rapidly distancing us from once-celebrated hostesses, making it likely that a young woman would forgo a midi-skirt in gray checked mohair — with a plumping effect at the waist — simply on the grounds that it was ugly and she couldn't possibly explain such iconography to her clueless friends.

In one respect, Mr. Valli's collection provided an interesting catalog of Paris interiors in the 1970s, for these clothes were essentially about the "where" and not the "what" — a difference between then and now. Mr. Valli focused on ankle-length coats and skirts, a well-defined waist and full sleeves gathered at the wrists. The epitome of this look was Sasha Pivovarova in a Chinese red blouse with a white skirt and matching red boots, her hair plastered in a French twist. There were also peacock-feather gowns and long-sleeve gold brocade dresses of the Empress Farah genre.

If there had been a Henri Samuel swag on site — or a Persian throne — it wouldn't have been a surprise.

Mr. Valli can make a convincing case that women might want long sleeves and more coverage, if only for a change. But not with an excess of bygone majesty. Ms. Pivovarova looked as out of place in her clothes as Madame Rothschild would have looked at McDonald's.

The emphasis on tailored day clothes (at Donna Karan and Michael Kors in New York; at Lanvin and Saint Laurent here) has brought an unexpected return of iconic dressers. One seems to catch glimpses of the Duchess of Windsor everywhere — or, as Michael Roberts, the fashion director of Vanity Fair, put it, "Isabella Blow in her Windsor period." He was referring to the late English stylist, who enjoyed a round pair of sunglasses and a fur fling.

The new designers at Valentino, Maria Grazia Chiuri and Pier Paolo Piccioli, simplified their clothes after a heavy debut in January. Wool shifts came with a soft spray of pleating on the bodice, and there were suits in sleek fabrics with caped jackets, as well as several fox-trimmed capes with proportions that belonged to another era. The clothes, while perfectly nice, were without surprise, wit or newness.

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