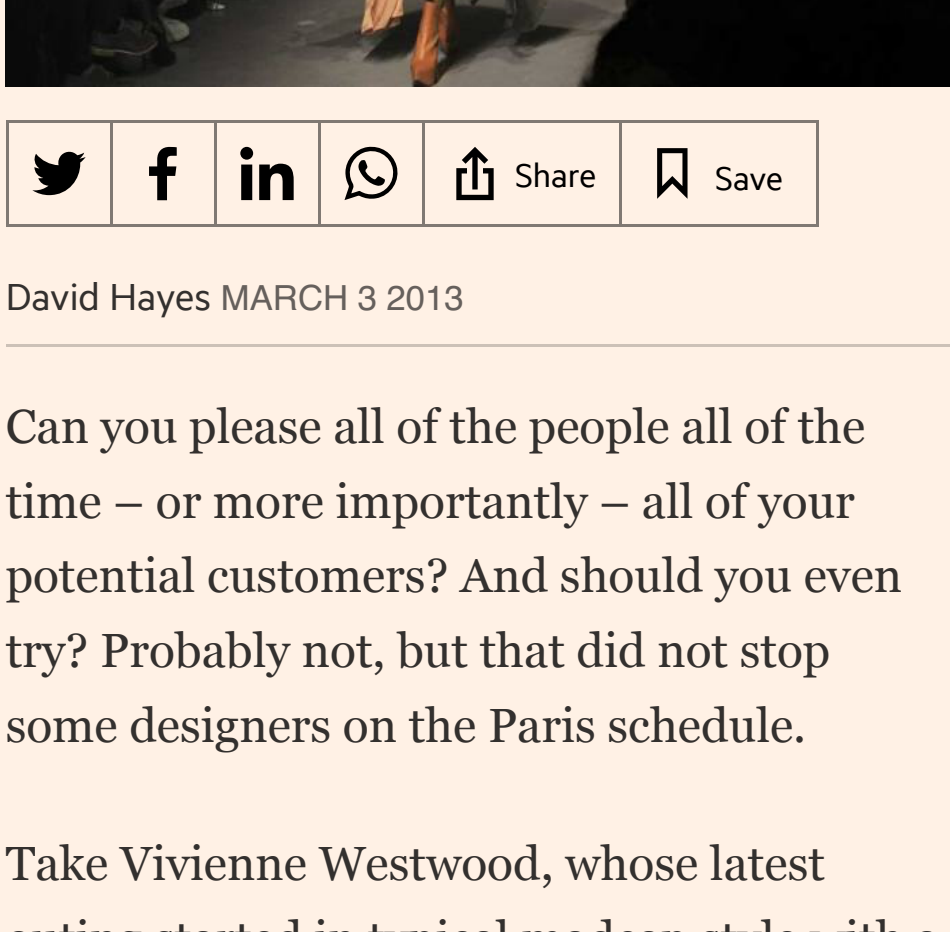


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Designers aim to please all customers

Some had overloaded messages, others retreated to signature styles



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David Hayes MARCH 3 2013

Can you please all of the people all of the time – or more importantly – all of your potential customers? And should you even try? Probably not, but that did not stop some designers on the Paris schedule.

Take Vivienne Westwood, whose latest outing started in typical madcap style with a blue “wode” face-painted model in sweeping ethnic cape, sheer lacy knit trousers and towering red platform boots. Blink, and there were square-shouldered, sharply tailored pinstripes. Look up again, and there was a pouf of a taffeta evening dress that had “Helena Bonham Carter red carpet moment” written all over it.

Add to that Ms Westwood’s latest political crusade – she has teamed up with Greenpeace to “Save the Arctic” – as well as some pretty cool bags produced in Kenya through the International Trade Centre’s Ethical Fashion Programme, and the end result was so overloaded with messages it was easier just to stop listening.

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Sonia Rykiel was also sending out mixed signals. Luxury group [Fung Brands acquired an 80 per cent stake in the label](#) in February 2012 and recently installed ex-Louis Vuitton studio designer Geraldo da Conceicao as artistic director. The last minute appointment made for an uneven show that swung from drop-crotch tailoring to “jokey” knits and cape-like furs – and a finale of three finely executed little black dresses.

Meanwhile, Kenzo designers Umberto Leon and Carol Lim cited Asian temples and the all-seeing eye beaming “north, south, east and west” as an inspiration, though the results were not as eclectic as it sounds: that eye seemed to have settled mainly on a host of eastern gap year references, from rich gold brocades to tie waist blouses, pyjama pants and wrap-over dresses. Still they should do a brisk business in eye motif sweatshirts next season.

Of course, the flip side to the “all things to everyone” approach is the retreat into “signature style” – a handy euphemism for doing the same old thing again. Dutch duo Viktor & Rolf had played with giant bows before and thought it a good time to revisit the look, this time cut in to the front of leather jackets or as the sleeve of an evening dress, paired with the odd piece of artfully “distressed” tailoring, and at Loewe, British designer Stuart Vevers made no attempt to broaden the Spanish leather brand’s remit, but celebrated – well, acres of Spanish leather.

Inspired by the architecture of Bilbao, Mr Vevers sent out graphic appliqué “sweatshirts”, split skirts and tailored suits with a few Mongolian lamb coats and high heel shoes sprouting a mane of “horse hair” from the back for good measure. If you like leather, you know just where to head next season.

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