

June 14, 2013 6:36 pm

Before the fall

By David Hayes

Forget summer; prefall is here and selling fast. Experts pick their favourites from the new collections



Prefall looks from Stella McCartney, Celine and Jonathan Saunders

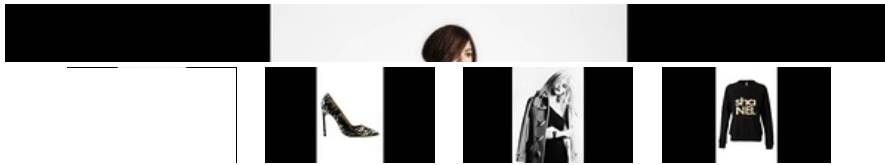
Summer may have only just reached parts of Europe, but fashion retailers have been thinking autumn – or at least “pre-fall” – for weeks now. Like the seasons, the fashion calendar has become ever more complex of late with even the smallest fashion label now producing a “pre” collection to fill the gap midway between the high-profile runway shows that typically mark out spring/summer and autumn/winter. Perhaps it’s not so surprising; buyers can now spend as much as 80 per cent of their budget on these in-between-the-season lines.

“The pre-collections have become really significant,” says brand strategist Anita Borzyszkowska. “Customers have become used to continuously having their interest stimulated and ‘pre’ is all about feeding that interest; they are always drawn to the ‘just in’ section online or in store.”

Tank magazine’s fashion director, Caroline Issa, agrees; “The increased turnover of new styles on the high street has pushed the luxury sector into supplying new things more frequently. It’s a wonderful side-effect of fast fashion; probably the only good one. The pre collections deliver ‘newness’ and, because they are not as editorialised as the main runway collections, still provide a bit of mystery. They are also a good way to buy into trends earlier on.”

Buying into pre’s key looks may mean a little seasonally adjusted creative thinking. “I bought a pale pink faux shearling coat from Nina Ricci’s pre-fall collection in May. It’s now completely sold out,” says Borzyszkowska, who also ordered a full-length rabbit fur coat from Céline as soon as the collection previewed online in early January.

For those not quite so on top of fashion’s odd seasonal schedule, however, we did a little legwork. Following are recommendations (and personal choices) from the fashion directors of some of the world’s major retailers.



Laura Larbalestier

Buying director, Browns

I wanted Erdem's 1950s-style emerald green dress from the moment I saw it; it's such a great colour and flatters everyone. Other great buys include Osman Yousefzada's navy brocade slim trousers and Christopher Kane's full, flower-print silk organza skirt with a heavy zip.

On my personal list of must-haves is a Mr and Mrs Furs camouflage parka. And pre-fall is actually the time I buy a lot of dresses like Erdem's floral print stretch cotton dress. I also love the playful "Sha NEL" logo sweatshirts from JP & L.

Sarah Rutson

Fashion director, Lane Crawford

Stella McCartney, Alexander McQueen, Proenza Schouler and Chloé are all key pre buys for us this season. I particularly love Stella McCartney's graphic colour-block dresses, her oversized zip-front bomber jackets and navy botanical motif tops and matching knee-length skirt.

I buy with wear it "right now" in mind but also something that reads of the season to come, like Céline's leather sunray pleat skirt, Givenchy's flannel grey trousers with attached skirt and Givenchy's camel bomber jacket.

Natalie Kingham

Head of fashion, Matches

Shearling is big for pre-fall and Balenciaga's brown tufted coat makes a great buy. I love Maison Martin Margiela's slouchy tuxedo-style trouser suit – and, as a contrast, the pretty blush pink velvet slip-dress from Nina Ricci. A "Queen Mum" chunky, low-heeled shoe is a must; Stella McCartney has one with a beautiful tortoiseshell heel.

My three personal top buys are a Céline pearl button coat, a pair of Gianvito Rossi metallic and perspex stilettos and a Christopher Kane ripped denim pencil skirt.

Tomoko Ogura

Fashion director, Barney's NY

Some of our favourite pre-fall collections are Saint Laurent, Givenchy, Carven, Acne Studios and Regulation by Yohji Yamamoto. Animal prints are having a moment; we particularly love Manolo Blahnik's zebra print pump and Acne Studio's spotted puffer jacket. Givenchy's lace skater shoes are key too. Yohji Yamamoto always adds an unexpected twist to seemingly basic clothes like his Regulation by Yohji Yamamoto's olive turtleneck knit and baggy chinos.

On my personal wish list is a Saint Laurent duffel coat, a Givenchy mosaic patchwork leather skate shoe and Proenza Schouler's new double-faced leather courier bag.

Paula Reed

Fashion director, Harvey Nichols

I think of the catwalk as the icing, but the pre-collection is the cake. I am particularly excited about our young British designers such as Peter Pilotto, Roksanda Ilincic, Christopher Kane and Jonathan Saunders. I also make a beeline for Nina Ricci, Proenza Schouler and Céline.

I am already in a tug of love with a rival in personal shopping over the most fabulous panelled yellow skirt by young French designer Cédric Charlier. I know the customer must come first but I'm hoping, whoever she is, she goes for something else.

Holli Rogers

Fashion director, Net-a-Porter

I love Saint Laurent's felt duffel coat, it is completely trans-seasonal. With white set to continue into next season, Valentino's tiered ivory dress and pleated front skirt is the perfect wardrobe staple. Punk will reign too and Jimmy Choo's studded ankle boot will give you a head start on the trend.

Top of my own wish-list is the Isabel Marant "Nowles" mountaineer wedge sneaker. I'm also coveting Stella McCartney's block-colour maxi dress, Christian Louboutin's multicoloured oval clutch and Lanvin's multi-strand long pearl necklace.

Sarah Lerfel

Creative director, Colette

I think pre should be quite classic and timeless – you can always go crazy with show pieces later. I love Valentino's red leopard evening bag, Reed Krakoff's black leather tote bag, Repetto's purple ballet pumps with embroidered eye motif, Guiseppe Zanotti's black stilettos with zebra pattern heels and We Are Handsome's penguin print tunic dress.

For myself I've gone for more fun, unique pieces; Charlotte Olympia's "popcorn" clutch, Sophia Webster's pencil print wedges and Christopher Kane's chunky zip front floral dress, which I bought as soon as it arrived.

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