

Simplicity reigns for Spring 2011

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Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week has closed for another season, but people will continue to buzz about what was seen on the runways and the inspiration behind the collections.

For Spring 2011, white took its place as the color of the moment. While white is always a relevant color (no matter what season), I don't think I've ever seen so many collections where model after model is wearing white or variations of it. Using so much white is dangerous and such a consistency might make designers seem like they had the intention of designing clothes for fashionable psych wards, but really these clothes cleansed the palette, especially after the weightiness of the couture shows.

Among others, Alexander Wang, Thakoon, Max Azria and Ralph Lauren took the white route for spring.

Seeing Wang step out of his comfort zone was refreshing since his collections are usually comprised of dark hues and heavier pieces. This was Wang's intention, though, as he told style.com that he was "looking for something optimistic, something pure."

The models not only had white and pastel colors on their bodies, but their hair also had traces of white paint.

Not every model and collection looked like a blank canvas, though.

Some traces of white could be seen at the Marc by Marc Jacobs show, but yellow, gray and orange dominated his collection, with almost every model having some hints of one of the three colors. It was toward the middle of his show that viewers started to see more of an Americana look, but he switched gears into some metallic looks toward the end. I can't say I was wowed by the collection as a whole, but there were nice subtleties throughout.

The Marc Jacobs show, on the other hand, was perfect in that it provided enough escapism, even if some of the pieces were too far-out for regular daywear.

The vibe was tropical meets psychedelic meets frizzed out Brigitte Bardot. Compared to the other shows, the Marc by Marc Jacobs show obviously took spring to a different decade and wanted to utilize as much color as possible and stay as far from white as possible.

Betsy Johnson gave the audience some excitement with her spunky show that more than made up for the stoic faces seen most of the week. The models had such "badass/I'm too cool for school" attitudes, and although some of the outfits were too 1980s princess/ripped up biker girl, Johnson pulled off every look and the models appeared sprightly in their outfits, regardless of the silver sparkling "Ride Me" neck braces that each wore.

Between the BCBG Max Azaria show and the Max Azaria show, the latter outdid the former. These two shows went hand-in-hand, each comprised of flowing fabrics and soft hues, but the effortlessness of the second collection overshadowed the effortlessness of the first. How that could be is astounding to me, but there were only a few key pieces that really stood out in the BCBG show, whereas each design that came down the runway in the Max Azaria show was strong and complimented the other designs.

Michael Kors was also on the white bandwagon, but his collection was more nature and garden inspired, and every few designs there would appear either a lush green, striking periwinkle or hot pink. Most of the designs were sleek and similar to what might appear at a Burberry show, while some skirts or dresses looked like they were made of nothing but bundled flower blossoms.

Marchesa was once again quintessential Marchesa, but that didn't mean the show was any less stunning. Diamond and jewel-encrusted necklines and bodices in conjunction with the intricate swoops of fabric in shades of ever-so-light pink, peach, black, gray and white brought up images of a type of *Swan Lake* fairytale. The construction and design of each gown were spectacular, careful attention given to all. Not only were the gowns eye-catching, but the shoes were like nothing I've seen from any of the other spring collections. The relationship between the gowns and the shoes was so perfect that one without the other wouldn't have been right.

What might have been the biggest disappointment of the week, for me at least, was Rodarte. The clothes looked like carpet swatches sewn together. The first piece to come down the runway was shocking. It was like taking a bite of something you thought would taste absolutely wonderful because it has proven to be delicious in the past, only to be...not so wonderful. It didn't matter when there was finally a relief with some floral pieces in much needed shades of blue. The smorgasbord of stripes and every-shade-of-brown plaids that appeared before and after the florals took away the limelight. The eccentricity of the designs is not necessarily the collection's downfall either. Rodarte's previous spring collection was eccentric and utilized a lot of varied prints and colors in one piece, but the models looked like fashionable warriors with tribal tattoos painted on their bodies and lips shaded crimson, completely Amazonian and cool. It can't be denied that the designs this year were definitely constructed well and were typical Rodarte, but it was almost impossible to see past the prints that were telling a *Little House on the Prairie* horror story.

Anna Sui could have followed suit with her paisleys and similar plaid patterns, but her modern take on the western look was executed successfully. The whole collection was strategically balanced and airy, even with the use of jean material and suede and leather boots. Delicate chiffon dresses and tops were the balancing parts of the equation, and simultaneously quelled my hunger for the youthful signs of spring. The models looked like polished hippies and wanderers of the California desert or Big Sur. This was *Prairie* done right, but only after an extreme makeover.

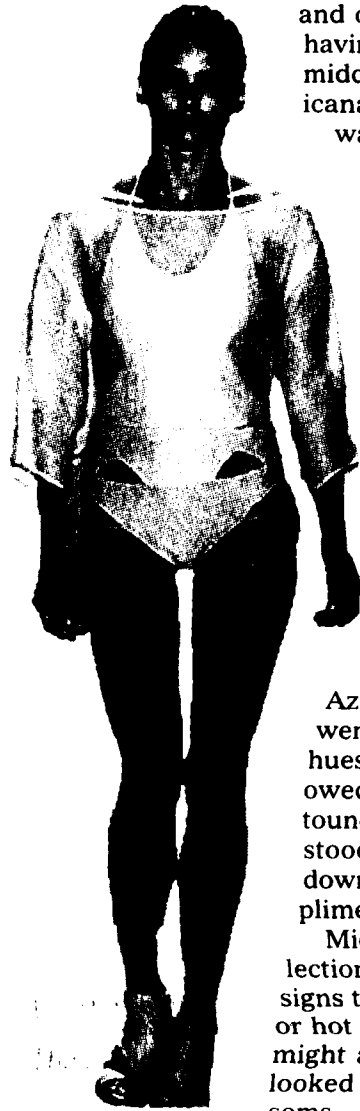
Ralph Lauren also did the western look. Polished, yes, but hippies, his models were not. Suede fringe coats and white floral laced tops and dresses made up most of his collection. The ensembles were pulled together and represented the class and elegance that makes up the RL brand.

Since these collections are ready-to-wear, it was nice to see some designers creating clothes that are actually possible to wear out and do not just make for a good runway show.

Rachel Roy's exhibition was just so right for spring and easy to digest. She had bright pops of colors and used neutrals and metallic appropriately. Diane von Furstenberg and Tommy Hilfiger also presented clean and colorful designs that most of the public will enjoy instead of the technical designs that many other designers showed.

With the clean fabrics and designs came clean faces with few features highlighted and natural hairstyles, which were probably created out of pounds and pounds of makeup and hair products, but the minimalist idea was greatly emphasized. Even the more outlandish designs were toned down by the fresh faced models. Marc Jacobs didn't adhere to the simplistic theme with his designs and neither did he keep the makeup and hair simple, choosing to kohl up the models' eyes and rim their lips in red.

The changes that came with spring and these collections will be needed and deeply appreciated once winter is done wreaking havoc on most of the country. In the meantime, the public can admire the designs and look forward to the season of renewal.



Above: Alexander Wang
Far left: Max Azria



Above: Max Azria
Below: Marc Jacobs



Above, below, below right DvF
Below far left: Tommy Hilfiger



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