The opening day of Paris haute couture week ended with three experienced, yet still very youthful designers -- Giambattista Valli, Julie de Libran, and Olivier Theyskens at Azzaro, showing collections that captured the unique energy that couture still ignites.

Giambattista Valli: Cultural melting pot couture

“My clients don’t want luxury ready-to-wear they want fantasy, big statement couture,” explained Valli, the fittest couturier in Paris, who in between designing collections gets boxing lessons from his personal trainer.

He pulled no punches with his latest couture collection; maximalist couture of fantastical proportions that nonetheless manages to be delicate and uber refined. Unveiled Monday evening in a video where a dashing male ballet dancer serenades a series of elusive beauties. A terrific courtship dance juxtaposed with images of historic Seville.

This summer, the Roman-born couturier wants his faithful fans in capes made of cascading layers of multi-frilled
silk taffeta; or balloon shaped tulle pleated skirts topped with embroidered lamé brocade waistcoats.

For more seductive moments, draped silk screen goddess gown trimmed with ostrich feathers or clouds of tulle cocktail dresses embroidered in porcelain flower ramage; a special concoction of hand-cut, tulle-backed leather petals and flowers delicately sewn onto many looks.

Valli divided his Christmas break between Rome and Seville. The first allowing him to lunch for multiple hours in open restaurants; the second served as the inspiration for this collection.

“I find Seville, and also Tangiers, as both fascinating. Because there is this meeting of two cultures – Hispanic and Islamic - that leads to the creation of a third culture, a hybrid culture where the best of two world mingle. And after the last few years, we need open borders and open minds again,” stressed Valli in a personal preview with FashionNetwork.com.

Flamenco fantasies wandered beneath Moorish towers. Pointillist coque-tips and ostrich feathers evoked the beauty of the gardens of Alcazar, while glittering polka dot ball gowns and golden dusk silk chiffon evening looks captured the Golden Age of Seville when Magellan departed on the first circumnavigation of the earth.

Valli’s work has achieved a new élan ever since he took on Artemis – the investment vehicle of the Pinault family – as a minority partner two years ago. There’s an increasing lightness to the designs and greater levity in their construction.

“It’s been a very beneficial investment. I can concentrate on what I do best, and I believe my work is stronger than ever,” concluded Valli.

Azzaro: Cinematic chic

The only thing missing was Romy Schneider in the latest collection for the house of Azzaro by Belgian creator, Olivier Theyskens.
A retro-modern homage with gallons of gumption; the collection was displayed in a dashing black and white video, shot near Maison Lafitte just outside of Paris. Moody metallic mode dissected by razor sharp cheekbones.

Playing with the house’s origins in 70s, high-octane glamour and metal cluster codes, Theyskens showed a hyper focused collection that will turn thousands of heads this summer.

Silk and viscose crushed velvet columns; glittering anthracite crystal sheathes; A-Line dresses in transparent organza fully embroidered in jet; or screen goddesses in crepe with metallic thread.

His ionic look, and opening image in the video, was a triple ring motif cut-out in a crepe dress. Triple ring holes then cut into multiple looks.

“For me haute couture is seasonless,” explained Theyskens, who deep dived into the Azzaro archive collection in the 11th arrondissement and saw the dresses the founder created for Dalida.

In a co-ed collection, he also showed rock star silver mesh suits; and classy impresario coats dusted in crystals. The lone guy and lone gal model circling each other in this homage to the Nouvelle Vague.

Julie de Libran: At home with Camille Rowe

Julie de Libran is such a self-confident couturier she even appears in her own video clips. This season lighting a cigar for a willowy beauty Camille Rowe in the opening image of her video, before the two enjoy a dance in crystalline sequined party frocks.
That’s right before Rowe, a green-eyed French American beauty, gets into a bath; where, French style, she enjoys a glass of Bordeaux. Time lapses of her show the model throwing on frilly mini dresses; or charming micro-floral wrap gowns.

De Libran, the hippest indie couturier in Paris, also ventured into tailoring with a great double-breasted boyfriend’s blazer and mini white jackets.

All shot with grace by director Sonia Sieff in Julie’s elegantly eclectic Parisian modernist Saint German apartment. The clothes had all the charm one associates with that every trendy neighborhood, and the accessories – jewelry by Goossens and shoes by Manolo Blahnik - were impeccable. However, for a contribution to Paris couture week, while charismatic and cool, this felt a little slight.

By Godfrey Deeny