Paris menswear Sunday: Contrasting visions at Thom Browne and Celine

By Godfrey Deeny - June 27, 2022

Paris menswear witnessed two contrasting visions on Sunday: Thom Browne posh demi-cross dressing in wool bouclé, and Hedi Slimane’s retro rocker statement amid thousands of millennial teeny boppers.

Celine: Banal clothes, feverish show

One word we never thought we’d used about Hedi Slimane was banal, but that's the adjective that came to mind watching his latest show for Celine.
Not that the event was banal, just a lot of the collection. In fact, there was sense of palpable frenzy about the whole event, staged in the Palais de Tokyo, along the Seine. Beginning with the huge crowds – at least 3,000 fans who cheered and screamed in rockers, influencers and, above all, K-pop band members.

When Lisa of Blackpink – the queen of K-pop and ambassador of Celine since 2020 – showed up, the crowd outside went into overdrive, overturning barriers, screeching her in. Having 78 million Instagram followers does suggest a certain popularity.

Even Bernard Arnault - the richest man in Europe, whose LVMH luxury conglomerate owns Celine – got in on the act. BA trotted outside to record her arrival along pals BTS's V and Park Bo-gum - on his mobile phone, as a small posse of security men and scores of Asian influencers followed in the multi billionaire's wake.

When the Asian stars were finally took their seats, the paparazzi inside then went into such a frenzy they made piranhas look like Trappist monks.

Finally settled, the show kicked off strongly with smartly tailored blazers and tuxedos, doused in crystal and fringed with silver string and pearls, worn over shorts and Chelsea boots with huge soles. Worn by models, their hair dyed and waxed back like early Roxy Music covers.

Hedi’s preferred footwear was a Cuban heel cowboy boot that will surely find followers. As has the brand. After perhaps initially struggling to make his mark at Celine, the brand has been gaining traction. LVMH do not break out Celine’s results, but judging from the cat like smiles on the face of Arnault, and the house’s CEO Severine Merle, Slimane is clearly hitting the numbers.

But not perhaps zapping the zeitgeist. For this was a weak collection by Hedi’s standards. From the Smarties hued sequined monkey suits or rather odd Stars and Stripes cable sweater there were a fair few clangers. Even Slimane’s famed tailoring was off it’s A Game, with oversized jackets cut with shrunken sleeves.

And the sheer repetition of the soundtrack, written and performed by Gustaf – with the endlessly repeated phrase, “You know people do terrible things” – didn’t help.

Nor did the fact that seconds after the end of the show – normally a moment, when the audience depart rapidly, an announcer insisted: “Ladies and gentleman please sit down you cannot leave.” And those who managed to escape the clutches of security guards and get out of the art space were greeted outside by such huge excited crowds, there was a disturbing Day of the Locust sensation.

All told, not a great show or outing from the designer so acclaimed as Slimane. The whole point about Hedi’s career is the skill with which one addresses popular culture and art using the median of fashion. This show, and collection, however, felt like a mere pale reflection of his great moments of previous seasons.

Thom Browne

It’s amazing how much mileage you can get out of a gray flannel suit, especially if you are Thom Browne, who opened his shows with five little boy bankers. Before things went pretty crazy.

The opening quintet appeared in the snuggest of jackets, shorts, wingtips and matching briefcases. Then a gang of icons, society beauties and grand dames arrived clutching invites in mock late arrivals for the show – from Marisa Berenson to Farida Khelfa. Feigning remorse and acting aghast that they could not find their seats.
Eventually seated, the cast resumed their tour inside the Automobile Club in Place de la Concorde – in the key fabric of wool bouclé, the sort normally favored by Chanel, in peppermint, pink, lime and sea-blue, finished with metallic threads. Coco for cool cats.

All cut suavely into blazers, mini jackets, top coats and redingotes, albeit with plenty of kinky accessories. Men in bouclé bras; or bouclé jockstraps. The latter worn with bumster skirts and shorts, so one could see plenty of bottom.

Bouclé on loafers, belts, ties and even anchor shape miniature face jewelry and adornments, all the way to a kennel worth of bags in the shapes of dogs – Jack Russells, terriers, corgis or dachshunds.

Faint cowboy references mingled together with posh Wasp codes, underlined by a country-and-western song on the soundtrack about bucking broncos.
In further fun moves, all the cast carried small signs with their numbers - like in old couture shows – except completely out of order.

All the way to the final look, with a bare bum bouclé wool cowboy. He had probably had never ridden further west than where Christopher Street meets the Hudson river, but did a great imitation of a barn dance, to the tune of Madonna’s *Don’t Tell Me*.

Talk about enormous applause, and after 12 days and some 100 shows the biggest cheer of the whole menswear season in Europe.

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