



# master crafts

at raf simons's dior, the feminine mystique is alive and well. by maura kutner walters. illustrated by natalie lines

Since Raf Simons ascended the creative throne at Christian Dior, tops are wispy, skirts are statement, and trousers are slim. The historically minimalist designer has a refreshingly different vision of the legendary label and the women who wear it—one consisting of pants under gowns, clashing colors, and busy bubble skirts—and if the reception he's received from the fashion world is any indication, he's onto something.

The Belgium-born, art-obsessed Simons has brought a jolt of frenetic energy to the brand after being named successor to John Galliano in April 2012. While his debut couture collection had strong ties to the architectural yet feminine shapes that were hallmarks of Mr. Dior's New Look (think nipped waists, Bar jackets, and full skirts), two seasons later Simons is forging his own Dior. He's creating clothes for a new tribe of women who are just as discerning as traditional devotees, but also a little bit wild.

Christian Dior was one of the preeminent couturiers in Paris before he introduced the New Look, his revolutionary take on ready-to-wear, in 1947, bringing some long overdue glamour to the masses of postwar Paris. "We were emerging from the period of war, of uniforms, of women-soldiers built like boxers," wrote Dior. "I drew women-flowers, soft shoulders, fine waists like liana and wide skirts like corolla." Simons has effectively created a new New Look—one reflective of our time. He has introduced lean suiting, statement outerwear, and psychedelic

riffs on the famous A-line silhouette. But make no mistake: Simons is not scrapping the trademark elegance of Dior. He's simply showing the next generation of women how to make it their own.

Recent faces of the brand's campaigns—Charlize Theron, Marion Cotillard, Natalie Portman, and Jennifer Lawrence—are the ultimate versions of the new Dior girl. They're serious actresses, the kind who take on dark, twisted roles, chop off their hair on a whim, win Oscars, and yet remain exceptionally private.

The same red carpet queens clamor for Simons's otherworldly haute couture. At the 2013 BAFTA Awards, Marion Cotillard's bright yellow silk bustier dress had a revealing panel sliced across the skirt to reveal the tops of her legs. The gray knitted evening dress Jennifer Lawrence wore to the Los Angeles premiere of *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* was this year's smartest take on the naked-but-not trend, oscillating between transparent and opaque with layers of folded fabric. It's this fool-the-eye craftsmanship that makes Simons one of the industry's

most intriguing designers—and it's what captivates the fashion cognoscenti season after season.

Meanwhile, Simons's python bags and pointy ankle-strap pumps have become ubiquitous among the street-style set, with sartorial stars both refined (French First Lady Valérie Trierweiler) and rebellious (The Misshapes' Leigh Lezark) pairing his sumptuous accessories with crepe blazers and skimpy crop tops. No matter the length of her hemline, the new Dior woman wants you to do a double take. Her cotton shirtdress has a smattering of crystals on the back, her Bar jacket may moonlight as a mindress, and her heels are spiked.

She is not immune to the power of the shock factor. She can't be bothered with a lot of makeup—a slick of mascara or a bold lip will do—and she usually throws her hair up in a messy bun. (Witness J.Law's barefaced ad campaigns.) The new Dior woman carries a quilted, chain-handled bag over her shoulder and balances its ladylike form with an oversized gray coat. Her look falls somewhere between polished and provocative. You'll know she's a member of Raf's club by the neon rosebud patch stitched on her blazer, a nod to Mr. Dior's love affair with flowers.



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