

## Milan Preview

## ONES TO WATCH

Whether a launch or a comeback, here's a crop of lines ready to swing into action next week.

## N. 21

Alessandro Dell'Acqua is restarting where he left off.

As he gets ready to unveil his new line, N. 21, with a runway show on Feb. 25, the Neapolitan designer will channel the same vision of beguiling stand-alone pieces that characterized his former signature line, to which he lost the rights in June.

The name of the self-financed project stems from Dell'Acqua's birthday, Dec. 21. It's also his lucky number.

An avid collector of Italian movies (he boasts a collection of more than 1,000 titles spanning from neorealism to late-Seventies B films), his fall lineup of 80 pieces was inspired by the warm sensuality of Monica Vitti in Michelangelo Antonioni's "L'avventura."

"It's all very Italian and sensual," said Dell'Acqua. "I liked the idea of contrasting elements, especially mixtures of sporty touches with more formal pieces." He cited a silk-lined sweatshirt with lace insets as an example.

Also on the sporty chic side are Neoprene-lined jackets or closures borrowed from wet suits. Fluid skirts temper pristine Oxford men's shirts, while knitwear, a Dell'Acqua specialty, comes either fitted or loose. Lace and silk georgette, two typically girly materials, are rendered more wearable, thanks to heavier weights.

Besides his trademark black and powder pink, Dell'Acqua's palette is upbeat, with bright tones like emerald green and fuchsia, often mixed together.

Retail prices cover a wide range. Jackets span from \$815 to \$2,718, coats run from \$1,332 to \$2,854 and the \$611 entry price for dresses nearly triples for more elaborate styles. Vaprio Stile manufactures the ready-to-wear while the Venice footwear factory Peron will make the shoes. — **Alessandra Ileri**

## MALO

Landing the creative director post at Malo was a homecoming of sorts for Saverio Palatella, who worked at the 38-year-old knitwear specialist in the Nineties.

After many ups and downs and an incongruous design vision of past designers who poured on the glitz, Palatella's challenge is returning Malo to its glory days of clean, modern sweaters.

"We really wanted to bring Malo back to its core business, making it once again the queen of cashmere to reconquer lost market share," said Massimo Suppang, managing director of Malo and Ittierre. He forecast 2010 sales exceeding \$41 million. The collection will be presented on Feb. 28 in the Malo showroom at 26 Via Archimede.

Palatella, who joined in October, focused on gender-bending pieces knit from fine-gauge cashmeres as well as chunky yarns in either slim or cocoon shapes. The color wheel rotates around camel, gray and black with shots of dusty rose, dawn orange and washed fuchsia, at times in *dégradé* effects or in *mélange* patterns.

On the beefy side are Fair Isle, cable and ribbed textures, alongside flat and fine gages fashioned closer to the body.

Sleeveless dresses or fitted jackets have a biker edge with oblique zips or chain mail trimmings. "I liked the idea of applying to knitwear the philosophy and the free spirit that characterizes a biker's life," said Palatella.

On a more urban note, thick-belted cardigans are tossed over matching turtlenecks and fuzzy leggings, while 8-ply cardigans are hand-knit for a wholesome effect. Sheared weasel is either laser bonded to cashmere or inserted into jackets, while short camel ponchos exude a cool Seventies edge.

The looks are topped by cozy accessories, like cashmere and silk footless stockings, fur-trimmed gloves and hats, suede totes with velvet trim. Basic cashmere T-shirts wholesale for about \$200, the zipped biker jacket is around \$680 and hand-knit pieces ring in at \$950.

Malo is part of IT Holding, which has been in govern-



ment-backed bankruptcy protection since February 2009. A decision about its future is expected soon. (For more on IT Holding, see page 24.) — **A.I.**

## GIULIANO FUJIWARA

Five years after becoming creative director of Giuliano Fujiwara, Masataka Matsumura said the time was ripe to address the "feminine universe."

That universe consists of a 22-piece capsule collection of women's apparel and accessories, which Matsumura, 30, describes as a "modest and modern statement."

It rounds out the line's men's wear and home furnishings and will be unveiled inside the brand's Milanese flagship on Via Borgospeso on Feb. 25 with a special installation.

Steeped in Japanese tailoring tradition and the idea of conceptual shapes, each piece springs to life via precisely executed pleatings, tucks and origami folds for a tridimensional effect. "It's certainly very understated because the only thing I want to show is the craftsmanship and the sturdy and compact fabrics," said the Japan-born Matsumura, who was educated in Switzerland and England. He still commutes between Japan and Italy, where the collection is manufactured.

Epitomizing his vision is a precision-cut cropped jacket over a high-waisted skirt. For accessories, Matsumura uses hand-sponged leathers, matte-shiny effects, mirror coatings and painted leathers.

The collection will be available in Fujiwara's flagships in Tokyo, Milan, Rome and Taipei, Taiwan, as well as in upscale specialty stores worldwide. On average, wholesale prices run from \$340 to \$1,087 and estimated sales for the fall collection are \$272,000.

Following the death of founder Giuliano Fujiwara in 2005, the company was sold to Steadfast, a Japanese firm with growing interests in the fashion arena. — **A.I.**

## DAVID GARAVITO

Born in Colombia, this Milan-based designer founded his namesake company in November after cutting his teeth at Giorgio Armani, Missoni and Escada.

Channeling Madeleine Vionnet, Cristóbal Balenciaga and Charles James, David Garavito designs cocktail fare and evening dresses that play up his sartorial techniques of draping and movement displayed on either feminine or more masculine shapes. "When I design a collection, I never start from a particular theme or image because my first thought goes to the construction," he said.

Garavito's base collection comprises 10 dresses, but he also offers what he calls "prêt-à-couture" service: high-end tailored products with accessible prices.

Heidi Klum, Andie MacDowell, Angela Bassett and Jane Seymour all chose his dresses during his tenure as chief designer at Escada. Now, Garavito's aim is to offer the general public custom-made formal dresses at noncustom prices. The line retails from 500 euros, or \$678 at current exchange, for a cocktail dress to 2,500 euros, or \$3,390, for a made-to-measure evening dress.

David Garavito shows at Brand 33, 33 Via Visconti di Modrone, from Feb. 24 to March 1. — **Alessandra Turra**

## GIANNI SERRA

After leaving his native Sardinia at 17, Gianni Serra landed in Milan, where he took fashion design courses at Istituto Marangoni. After graduation, he moved to Rome, where he became a theatrical costume designer. There, fascinated by couture, he launched his namesake line at Alta Roma in 1998, and 11 years later, back in Milan, Serra branched out with ready-to-wear. Last July, he was among the finalists of "Who Is on Next?"

Serra's creativity draws from the Bauhaus rationalism. "I'm all for absolute rigor. What I intend to do is take superconstructed couture pieces and deconstruct them for everyday wear," he explained, adding jackets are a key component of each collection. "Constructing a jacket is always the starting point for me."

Banishing frills, Serra played with vertical lines and proportions, pairing ultralong with supershort pieces. Fabrics, stolen from the men's wardrobe, are shiny, thanks to a silicone coating, or are matted for a raw effect. Black and white are the leading colors, with a bit of gray and a flash of mandarin.

The collection wholesales from 230 euros, or \$312, for pants to 870 euros, or \$1,181, for a coat. It's sold at JFT in Hong Kong and Wok Store in Milan.

The line will be shown by appointment from Feb. 21 to March 19 at 19 Via Sidoli. — **A.T.**



Maria Ruano

Nicholas Iulitta

## ROOKIE SEASON

Two rising talents selected by a jury of fashion specialists during "My Own Show," a competition organized by the Istituto Europeo di Design (European Institute of Design) with the support of Aeffe and Valentini, will present their debut collections with an installation on Feb. 25 from 4 to 9 p.m., at 5 Via Bezzecca. — **A.T.**

## MARIA RUANO

Age: 29

Education: IED Madrid

Producer: Aeffe

**Fall inspiration:** Inspired by the desire to capture what is truly necessary and fundamental, the Spanish designer created a collection of clean and wearable pieces. "The aim is to make the wearer feel protected from the outside and comfortable inside at the same time," said Maria Ruano. Unfussy and quasi-unisex silhouettes get an edgy treatment thanks to precious details and hand-sewn finishes for a minimal-yet-luxurious look.

**Hot item:** A Loden-Steiner wool kimono-sleeve jacket paired with shorts in the same fabric, both trimmed with grosgrain and lined in naturally hand-dyed silk.

**Wish list:** Not attracted to the idea of working for big names, Ruano has a clear plan for her future business: "I would like to start something small, that could grow slowly

and safely through a sustainable process that can be constantly monitored."

## NICHOLAS IULITTA

Age: 26

Education: IED Milan

Producer: Valentino Fashion Group

**Fall inspiration:** After writing a short essay titled "La Vergine di Norimberga" ("The Iron Maiden of Nuremberg"), which tells the story of a proud woman who discovers her weakness and fragility, Iulitta recounts her interior journey via ultraheavy leather and fur distressed by acid treatments.

**Hot items:** A hooded bomber in rust lamb leather and a red sleeveless fur cobbled with remnants of shaved fox.

**Wish list:** The half Italian-half Belgian dreams of an innovative experience with his favorite designer, Carol Christian Poell. "He is the top," mused Iulitta. "He doesn't design to sell, but rather for his love of fashion."