

Main Character

What does luxury look like in 2025? For body confidence advocate Sarah Nicole Landry, it's feeling free to wear whatever she wants, whether that's a statement-making coat or an itty-bitty bikini

Photography by Ted Belton

HardWear by Tiffany



HardWear by Tiffany

A design from 1962 inspired
by New York, a city in flux.

An expression of love's
transformative strength.

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Outer layer



Vulnerability isn't a typical strategy on *The Traitors*, but it is new star Sarah Nicole Landry's superpower. She tells Annika Lautens how she owns her cellulite, struggles and softness

For the first time in 17 years, Sarah Nicole Landry recently took a break from social media.

In July, the brains behind the social media account @thebirdspapaya surrendered her phone and logged off completely—a radical move for someone whose entire career has been built online. "I've never gone 24 hours without posting," Landry says, laughing. "So to physically hand over my phone and go be a part of something like this was a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

That experience was *The Traitors: Canada*, the hit reality competition series she's joined for its third season, which premiered Oct. 21 on Crave. As on the show's Emmy-winning U.S. and U.K. counterparts, contestants are dropped into a game of psychological warfare where a group of hidden "traitors" work to sabotage the benign "faithfuls."

A longtime *Traitors* fan, Landry didn't wait to be cast—she applied herself. A few months later, she was packing her bags and stepping into a world of mystery, chaos and constant second-guessing.

"I went in being open to the process and ready to be vulnerable," Landry says. "The game is so unpredictable, but I've been trying to say yes more and stop overthinking all the reasons to say no. I'm decentering fear."

To a bystander, "fear" does not appear to be in Landry's vocabulary. Over the 17-year evolution of The Birds Papaya, the 40-year-old Guelph-based content creator has become a beacon of body confidence. Whether she's unapologetically flaunting her stretch marks in a Knix campaign, strutting down the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit runway in an itty-bitty bikini or hosting raw conversations about motherhood and changing bodies, Landry is a disruptor. She owns her size, her cellulite and her struggles—and shares it all with a warmth and honesty that feels deeply intimate.

"Women's 'Roman Empire' is our weight and what we look like," she declares, in that instantly disarming yet deeply wise way of hers. "It's a hum in our brain that for me used to be very loud. Now it's still there, but I have more control over the volume."

Landry started The Birds Papaya as a blog in 2008, after moving to Ottawa with her first husband. A stay-at-home mom with two little girls (she now has three daughters and one son), she was feeling disconnected and turned to blogs for support. "I was finding other people who were in those same spaces, and I remember just wanting to be able to talk back," she recalls. Under a moniker borrowed from her daughters' nicknames—Jemma "Birdie" and Maya "Papaya"—she started writing about her life as a young mom, sharing meal ideas and DIY crafts along the way.

But just as she was finding her footing, the digital landscape dramatically shifted. The world was introduced to Instagram, and suddenly food photos weren't enough. The internet expected—nay, *demanded*—selfies, outfits of the day and for Landry to become the face of her brand. That felt destabilizing.

"I'd just moved back to Guelph and my body had changed a lot from when people saw me last," explains Landry. "I was newly postpartum after my third child and I remember being really embarrassed about what I looked like. I wanted to feel better about myself."

> I didn't want to go back to being on the sidelines of my own life.

So Landry lost weight. Like, a lot of weight. She shed 100 pounds, getting down to a size zero while feeding her newfound followers waist-slimming and diet-promoting content and watching her social numbers soar in the process.

Looking back, it's hard to believe that woman is the same one I'm chatting with today. Landry is the first to admit nothing about it was healthy, although she didn't recognize it at the time. She was never formally diagnosed with an eating disorder, but her body was, in her words, "tightly controlled."

"I'd fallen into an obsession about how I looked and how much weight I was losing, because it had become part of my success story," Landry says. "But everything that I thought it was going to fix—feeling bad about myself, being more engaged with my kids—didn't happen. In fact, I was actually more critical about myself."

Tired of feeling, frankly, terrible, Landry began seeking out voices that made her feel happier in her own skin and slowly but surely, her own content followed suit. Still, she credits being paired with model Truth Alexis during her first Knix photo shoot in 2018 as a pivotal turning point.

"I remember looking at her and she had stretch marks on her thighs and cellulite on her back and I was just like, 'This is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen,'" she recalls. "She's so confident and none of those things are holding her back."

It was then that Landry decided she wouldn't let those things hold her back, either. Through a divorce, moving back home to Guelph, meeting her now-husband, welcoming another beautiful baby and the postpartum body that came with it, Landry broke free—and the internet fell even more in love with her for it. "I didn't want to go back to being on the sidelines of my own life—I really wanted to live it," she says.

Today, no one could accuse her of staying on the sidelines. Landry has transcended the world of social media, launching a podcast, collaborating with Knix, walking (and hosting!) red carpets and yes, strutting down the Sports Illustrated Swimsuit runway.

"It wasn't about being flattering—f–k flattering," she says proudly. "I wasn't going out with an apology. That experience was about owning my body and the fact that I love wearing a string bikini."

For Landry, fashion has become less about hiding and more about celebrating. She gravitates toward sheer dresses, low-rise pants paired with crop tops and anything else that represents a refusal to conceal, to cover up. Except when it comes to coats.

"There's an energy that comes with wearing a big faux fur or leather jacket," she says. "But we always give so much credit to the clothing. This coat didn't make you powerful—you are powerful."

After hearing about Landry's body acceptance journey, defiant modelling stints and heck, even her view on coats, I tell her she sounds pretty invincible. But she quickly disagrees. "I'm actually very soft, which is funny because people will often come to me and be like, 'I just wish I had your confidence,' and I'm like, 'I wish I did, too!'"

For Landry, confidence is not a one-and-done deal. It's a decision you have to make over and over again. Some days, it sucks. Others are easier. It's about moving through the discomfort and not allowing fear to control you.

"Our bodies are going to change a million times, so we are actively grieving and falling in love with ourselves over and over again," she says. "That doesn't always look pretty—it's a choice every day. And I choose to love myself."

WRAPPED IN STYLE

Bundle up in the season's standout Canadian coats



Rudsak's reversible faux shearling and vegan leather coat features zip-off sleeves and panels to transform effortlessly from longline layer to cropped jacket or vest.

RUDSAK COAT, $795, RUDSAK.COM



Capes are having their hero moment. Sentaler's take—complete with a built-in scarf to ward off the fall chill—makes it an intuitive silhouette that does your cold-weather styling for you.

SENTALER COAT, $2,150, SENTALER.COM



An elevated revamp on the worker jacket, RW&Co's cropped, utilitarian design brings ladylike polish to even the simplest fall outfit—whether you're apple picking or chasing autumn colour.

RW&CO COAT, $200, RW-CO.COM



The 2000s called—and Smythe answered. Water-resistant with a detachable hood, this oversized army-green anorak layers seamlessly over chunky knits and off-duty denim.

SMYTHE COAT, $995, SHOPSMYTHE.COM



Roots reimagines cozy sophistication in midnight blue. Crafted from a recycled-wool blend, this shawl-collar coat instantly elevates everything from your chicest cable knits to sleepy sweats.

ROOTS COAT, $228, ROOTS.COM



FEELING BLUE: Soften the structural silhouette of a strong-shouldered coat with powder-blue hues. Ground the look with statement earrings to strike the perfect balance.

LOVECHILD 1979 COAT, $275, VSPCONSIGNMENT.COM. **COS** EARRINGS, $175, COS.COM. **WE LOVE COLORS** TIGHTS, $18, WELOVECOLORS.COM. SHOES, STYLISTS OWN

You can make such a statement with a coat. It can accentuate a vibe, a feeling, a moment.



EVER GREEN: A tailored coat in forest green brings warmth, depth and just the right amount of sophistication to winter dressing.

KASSL EDITIONS COAT, $795, **REIKE NEN** SHOES, $195, VSPCONSIGNMENT.COM. **LOEWE** EARRINGS, $225, REWINDCOUTURE.COM. **HUE** TIGHTS, $23, LEGGSBEAUTIFUL.COM



FUZZY WUZZY: Lean into the drama–a bold faux fur coat is the statement piece that instantly transforms any outfit and mood.

FREED & FREED COAT, $645, FREEDANDFREED.COM. **CHOPARD** NECKLACE, PRICE UPON REQUEST, CHOPARD.COM

THINK PINK: A hit of pink against grey skies is the ultimate mood booster—equal parts playful and polished. Proof that dopamine dressing is never a bad idea.

FENDI COAT, SHOES, PRICE UPON REQUEST, FENDI.COM. **VAN CLEEF & ARPELS** RING, PRICE UPON REQUEST, VANCLEEFARPELS.COM. **VICTORIA BECKHAM** SKIRT, $395, VSPCONSIGNMENT.COM



LOVE BOMBER: For an instant dose of effortless cool, a wool bomber with relaxed sleeves invites easy layering while keeping the silhouette sharp and modern.

CANADA GOOSE JACKET, $995, CANADAGOOSE.COM. **LOEWE** EARRINGS, $225, REWINDCOUTURE.COM. **AMI** SKIRT, $1,180, HOLTRENFREW.COM. **STAUD** BOOTS, $695, HOLTRENFREW.COM

OPPOSITE PAGE: **NINA RICCI** CAPE, $2,650, HOOD, $1,055, WDLT117.COM

COVER: **FENDI** COAT, PRICE UPON REQUEST, FENDI.COM. **VAN CLEEF & ARPELS** EARRINGS, PRICE UPON REQUEST, VANCLEEFARPELS.COM

STYLING: GEORGIA GROOM (PIM). MAKEUP: GRACE LEE (CADRE ARTISTS). HAIR: JASON LEE (CADRE ARTISTS)

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THE NEW FRAGRANCE

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That's rich

What smells expensive? As Sarah Daniel explains, the answer depends more on who you're asking than a fragrance's price tag



Baccarat Rouge 540 has become synonymous with smelling expensive. A potent floral, woody, amber perfume with a powerful sillage, it's been crowned a "rich girl" fragrance on TikTok and worn by jetsetting celebrities from pop star Olivia Rodrigo to NBA star Dwight Howard. Its price tag was already trust fund–coded (a 200-mL bottle is close to $1,000), but recently its perfumer, Francis Kurkdjian, said hold my Moët: He launched a limited edition version of the fragrance for $28,000 USD a bottle.

Baccarat Rouge 540 Édition Millésime comes with a crystal case and bottle capped with 24K gold, a refill membership and the exclusive perk of owning one of only 54 bottles made per year for the next decade. Kurkdjian, who creates fragrances for his own label as well as Parfums Christian Dior, also added natural ambergris to the scent's formula—which already includes the synthetic version, Ambroxan, a lab-made aromachemical with amber, wood and mineral elements—further steepening the cost.

Like an Hermès Birkin, real ambergris is rare and difficult to procure. It's made in the digestive systems of sperm whales and requires an expert eye to find the clumps of it that wash up on beaches. "Rare naturals will always be the most expensive, especially if labour-intensive and in dwindling supply on our precarious planet," says Toronto writer and scent consultant Tracy Wan. She also points to Mysore sandalwood, jasmine, orris, Bulgarian rose and oud.

But does the presence of pricier ingredients like ambergris actually make a fragrance smell more expensive? "Our response to fragrances is so contextual and dependent on personal experiences and cultural associations that it's hard to say categorically," says Wan. Like art and fashion, scent is subjective, so what smells luxurious to one person can be off-putting to someone else. "What's popular and considered luxurious in the Middle East, for example, is not popular in East Asia, given the cultural norms and associations of each."

There is one fragrance family often cited as evoking luxury: Amber. These scents are "rich, opulent, resinous. But others might think that these perfumes are too heavy, dense, loud, and therefore the opposite of their definition of luxury."

Chypres can smell expensive, says Montreal-based perfumer Isabelle Michaud, founder of Monsillage fragrances worn by Canadian notables such as Sophie Grégoire Trudeau. A chypre combines fresh top notes with contrasting "patchouli and oak moss and then a floral that shines through," says Michaud. "It has a very luxurious feel and creates a sense of uniqueness."

The complexity of a fragrance can affect how its quality is perceived. "Several generations of perfume wearers were conditioned to feel that fragrances had to smell complicated to be expensive, and therefore to be status symbols," says New York perfume historian Jessica Murphy, who writes the Substack Show & Smell, pointing to "abstract" bestsellers like Chanel No. 5 and Yves Saint Laurent Opium.

A sense of rarity or novelty also plays a part. "When a prominent note reminds us of something we might come across in an everyday place like a supermarket, we're likely to think the fragrance is less desirable from a status viewpoint," Murphy says. Unless that supermarket happens to be L.A. hippie-luxe Erewhon, which inspired Louis Vuitton perfumer Jacques Cavallier-Belletrud's Pacific Chill fragrance.

The smell of an apple, chocolate chip cookie or pine-scented floor cleaner might read as banal, but "notes that don't refer directly to our everyday experiences," such as "sheer musks, amber accords or notes of cultivated flowers like tuberose or gardenia, might translate as more aspirational and therefore worth a higher price," says Murphy.

The rise of pricier perfumes has driven dupe culture among those seeking more affordable versions of a popular scent in formats like candles and hand creams. (Bath & Body Works' Book Loft is a noted stand-in for Diptyque's L'Eau Papier.) But those with more disposable income—or bigger allowances—are leaning into conspicuous fragrance consumption. "Smell-maxxing" is a trend that's seen teenage boys dousing themselves in luxury fragrances like Tom Ford's Tobacco Vanille. (This may not come as a surprise to Ford, whose own son Jack just turned 13.) "It's like a status thing right now—they all want it," one parent told the *New York Times*.

While it's a new development that high school hallways smell as sophisticated as opera houses, intentionally scenting spaces is something hotels have been doing for decades. Perfume house Diptyque partners with Ritz-Carlton to create signature fragrance experiences for guests. The glamorous Hôtel Plaza Athénée in Paris is scented by Dior, its neighbour on Avenue Montaigne since 1946. And perhaps the most famous partnership, New York's Gramercy Park Hotel x Le Labo, culminated in the brand developing its beloved Santal 33. Four Seasons hotels, as seen in *The White Lotus*, curate each property's scent to suit the location, culture and experience. Warm Welcome, the Toronto Four Seasons' house scent, blends grapefruit, blackcurrant, saffron, cedar, leather and sandalwood; it will eventually be available at the hotel boutique.

> Perfume wearers were conditioned to feel that fragrances had to smell complicated.

Known as "prestige fragrances," pricier scents are often developed in the same labs as mass scents: at fragrance houses like Firmenich and Givaudan, teams of perfumers oscillate between the categories. Early in Kurkdjian's career at Quest, he developed the wildly successful Jean Paul Gaultier Le Male, and followed it up with an Axe body spray called Lynx.

Many luxury brands produce extra-exclusive collections sold alongside their more widely available fragrances, like Armani's niche line Armani Privé to the bestselling Acqua di Giò.

"Sometimes the prestige perfumes are better-crafted," says Wan. The perfumer is likely given a bigger materials budget, which can open up creativity. But sometimes they're just more potent, a growing trend that taps into the assumption that stronger is better. Brands like Byredo are releasing "extraits," which are "concentrated versions of previous perfumes that promise better longevity and performance, at a higher price tag."

Often, though, budgets for celebrity spokespeople and splashy launches are behind the increased costs. (This is big business: The luxury fragrance category is expected to be worth close to $35 billion USD globally by 2030.) More insidiously, "sometimes, a niche or prestige brand will establish higher pricing just to encourage a perception of value," says Murphy.

Perception is powerful—it can even cause us to smell something that isn't there. Many Canadians detected a (nonexistent) maple syrup note when the government switched from printing paper money to polymer-based bills in the 2010s. At the time, Marilyn Jones-Gotman, a neurology and neurosurgery professor at McGill, described this as an olfactory illusion usually triggered by emotional stimuli.

Whether a perfume's value is perceived or real, it shouldn't get in the way of scents we choose for ourselves. "Fragrance wearers should feel free to develop their own tastes and choose fragrances that really resonate with them personally," says Murphy. "Regardless of price."

IN THE KNOW

Five scents that whisper wealth with every spritz



This stars "ghost orchid," an aromachemical captured by a glass dome over the elusive flower.

TOM FORD BLACK ORCHID RESERVE, $270 (50 ML), HOLT RENFREW



This is the scent of five-star Ritz-Carlton hotels, an homage to sunkissed Mediterranean fig trees.

DIPTYQUE PHILOSYKOS EAU DE TOILETTE, $252 (100 ML), LAMAISONGENERALE.CA



This intense new take on a 100-year-old classic adds precious Madagascar vanilla tincture.

GUERLAIN SHALIMAR L'ESSENCE, $161 (50 ML), GUERLAIN.CA



The new Le Dix collection includes this warm, cashmere-evoking blend of oud, oak moss and patchouli.

BALENCIAGA CRISTÓBAL, $355 (100 ML), BALENCIAGA.COM



Aesop hand wash is synonymous with chic hotels; its new amber scent has frankincense, cardamom and vanilla.

AESOP ABOVE US, STEORRA, $260 (50 ML), AESOP.COM

Finer things

From quality craftsmanship to the joy of free time, 10 Canadian creatives share what luxury means to them now



"Luxury is caring about the inside of the garment even more than the outside. It's about paying attention to the minutiae and details that 99 per cent of people won't notice but 1 per cent will deeply appreciate."

Emefa Kuadey, fashion engineer & founder of Israella Kobla



"Luxury is a quality you can trust, that you keep for a lifetime and pass on to future fashion collectors."

Myles Sexton, stylist and HIV advocate



"Luxury is transparency, knowing the whole story. This includes how and where raw materials are sourced and who is preparing them."

Jenn Harper, founder and CEO of Cheekbone Beauty Cosmetics



"Luxury is being intentional with the pieces I bring into my life. Let's be real, though—the artist in me sometimes goes rogue and splurges on an impractical little handbag."

Briony Douglas, artist



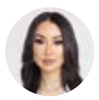
"Luxury is happiness—a calm mind, the ability to live in the present and to fully enjoy what life offers."

Golnar Ahmadian, founder and creative director of Golshaah and *Lobat Accessories*



"Luxury is an experience. Be it fashion, home or lifestyle, it's all in the details."

Lisa Corbo, digital creator



"Luxury is the freedom to shape your days with intentions, to follow your dreams, nurture your soul and truly live in the moment."

Angela Lee, celebrity makeup artist



"Luxury is time—the rare freedom to slow down, be creative and let ideas breathe."

Vanja Vasic, founder & executive director of Fashion Art Toronto



"Luxury is going to a restaurant and ordering whatever I want and not looking at the price!"

Brooke Lynn Hytes, host of *Canada's Drag Race*



"Luxury is many things, but the one that I keep coming back to is an evening sitting around a table with friends, family, great food and a little wine."

Nadia Pizzimenti, fashion stylist

TEXT: ANNIKA LAUTENS (FINER THINGS); PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES (THAT'S RICH), SUPPLIED (FINER THINGS)

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L'ORÉAL PARIS AGE PERFECT COLLAGEN EXPERT: YOUR KEY TO RADIANCE

Jeanne Beker, Genevieve Borne and Natasha Ramsahai on why the perfect age is now

Canadian media icons Jeanne Beker, Genevieve Borne and Natasha Ramsahai are living proof that age ain't nothing but a number. Fulfilled, strong and radiant, they continue to remind the world that there's no perfect age to pursue your dreams – so do what matters to you now. And L'Oréal Paris Age Perfect is what they all turn to to keep their skin looking as good as they feel.

The best-kept beauty secret of women over 50, L'Oréal Paris Age Perfect Collagen Expert is a tried-and-true skincare essential for a reason. With formulas tailored for day and night use, there's no need to spend time on a complicated routine or money on an overpriced cream. Age Perfect is easy to use and delivers instant confidence.

Both are formulated with effective ingredients that intensely moisturize, firm and even the skin. Collagen peptides contain amino acids, the building blocks of the skin, to help retain moisture, firm and tighten, while niacinamide, aka vitamin B3, brightens skin and reduces the appearance of age spots. Skin is immediately hydrated and nourished and, after eight weeks, it looks more radiant, glowing, and healthier.

But don't just take our word for it – these three stars all swear by L'Oréal Paris Age Perfect Collagen Expert thanks to the dewy, plumpy results and the fact that it keeps up with their full, rewarding lives.



JEANNE BEKER, ICONIC FASHION JOURNALIST

Jeanne Beker has achieved some major milestones since turning 50 – being named to the Order of Canada, receiving a star on Canada's Walk of Fame, writing a best-selling memoir and co-curating a major museum retrospective exhibit of her career opening next year at Calgary's Glenbow museum. Not only does she say she feels empowered by the art of aging, she also found deep happiness on a personal level when she met the love of her life at age 63. "'The best is yet to come' is an old adage that I've always believed in," Jeanne says. "But now, more than ever, I subscribe to that kind of positivity. It's a constant reminder of why we must never lose faith in life's wonderful possibilities."



NATASHA RAMSAHAI, CHIEF METEOROLOGIST FOR CITYNEWS

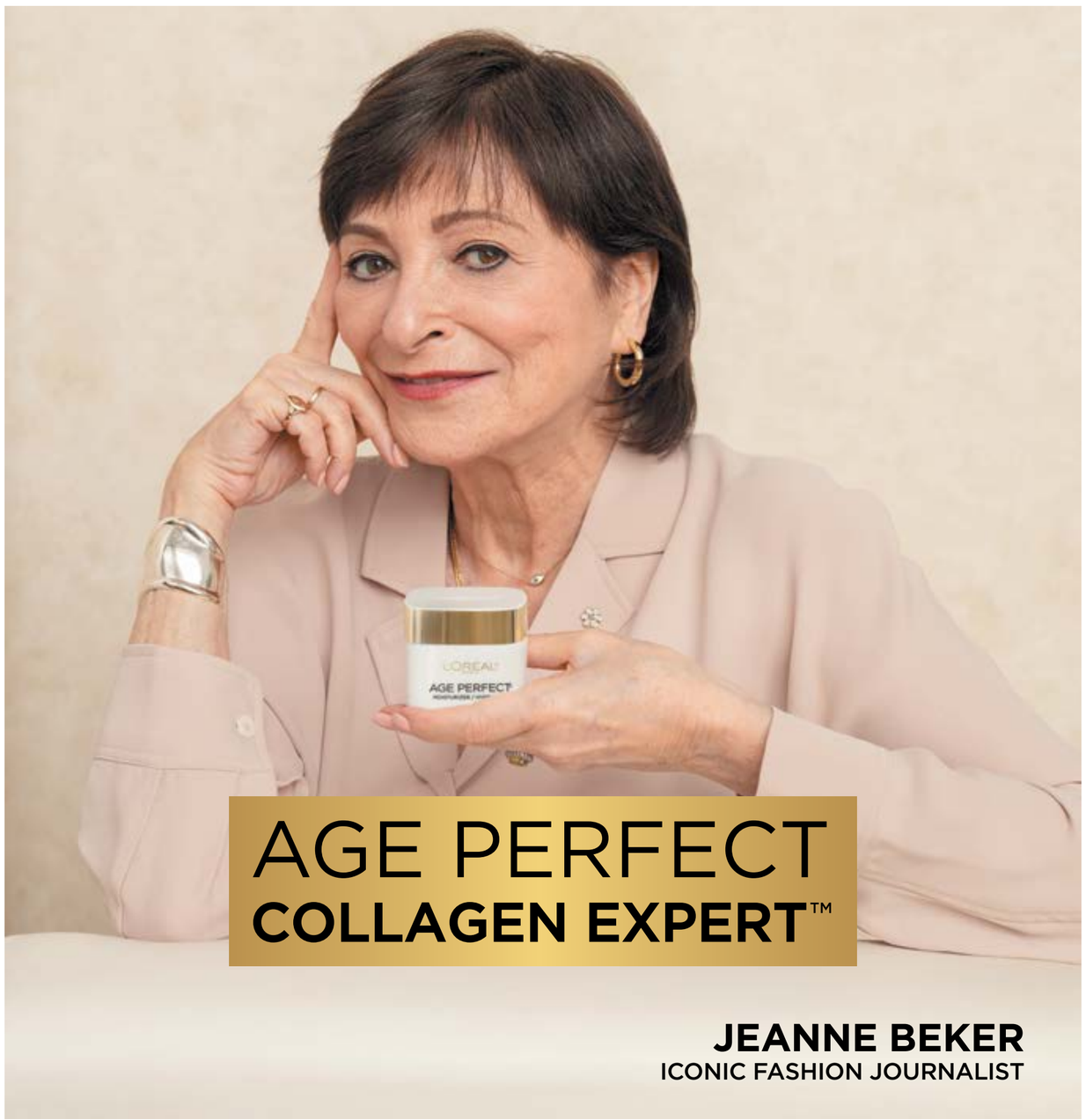
For the first chief meteorologist of colour in the country, one of the best parts of aging has been discovering a newfound sense of courage. When Natasha turned 50, she said goodbye to fears of body shaming to follow in her mother's footsteps and play mas as a reveller at the Toronto Caribbean Carnival, where she had the time of her life dancing in the streets and proudly representing her Trinidadian culture. "I love that at this age our courage and self confidence grows and I can keep pushing boundaries and societal expectations with style, grace and a lot of audacity," Ramsahai says.



GENEVIEVE BORNE, TELEVISION AND RADIO HOST

There's no slowing down for Genevieve Borne, who says she still has plenty of dreams in life she wants to achieve. One adjustment she has proudly made to her everyday life is reaching a state of work-life balance, focusing on projects that inspire and making plenty of time for friends, family, travel and herself. Indeed, self-care has become a major priority for Genevieve. Lifestyle changes like forgoing alcohol, eating organic food and going for long walks has helped her feel even more comfortable in her skin, as does L'Oréal Paris Age Perfect Collagen Expert. "It keeps my skin hydrated, luminous and plump – day and night," she says.

This content was created by The Kit; L'Oréal Paris funded and approved it.



THE KIT X ROC



RoC Skincare Derm Correxion Firming Serum Stick, $43.97 at Walmart

MEET THE LIFTING AND TIGHTENING SERUM STICK YOUR ROUTINE'S BEEN MISSING

Why we can't get enough of RoC's innovative serum stick

It's impossible to turn back the clock, but RoC Skincare sure comes close. Backed by more than 150 clinical studies and three decades of research in retinol, this French brand continues to lead the way in skincare solutions, and its newest launch is no exception.

A convenient, clinically backed solution for visible skin rejuvenation, RoC's new Derm Correxion Firming Serum Stick is a retinol-based, easy-to-apply stick designed to lift, tighten and smooth skin both instantly upon application and gradually over time. In short – it's a true skincare gamechanger.

This serum stick was developed in partnership with dermatologists and plastic surgeons to reduce fine lines, firm, lift and tighten. It's non-drying and non-comedogenic, which means it's suitable for even the most sensitive skin types. And it's not just for use on the face – this multiuse stick can also be used on the neck, chest and hands.

Chances are you've heard the buzz about retinol and how it's a gold-standard ingredient in skincare. As skin begins losing elasticity and volume, a process that begins as early as your late 30s due to decreased collagen and elastin production, retinol can help maintain a more youthful-looking complexion, which is why it is a stand-out ingredient in RoC's newest serum.

Free of fragrances and parabens, the new Derm Correxion Firming Serum Stick is formulated with THPE, which tightens and contours, and Pure RoC Retino to support collagen and elastin while also reducing fine lines and wrinkles. Together, these skincare power-player ingredients firm, lift and smooth,giving you major results.

The Derm Correxion Firming Serum Stick is clinically proven to instantly increase smoothness by 90 per cent. Plus, 94 per cent of users had visibly reduced lines in one week and visibly firmer skin in four weeks. It's basically a non-invasive, at-home lift – no appointment required.

To use this lifting serum, simply twist up the base and remove the inner safety cover before applying it to any areas of concern on your face, neck, chest and the backs of your hands. Because retinol is such an effective ingredient, you'll want to ease its way into your routine. Start by applying the serum every other night before increasing gradually to daily use.

And don't forget to apply your SPF 15+ during the day. Not only is sun protection a major component in preventing signs of aging, retinol makes your skin more sensitive to UV rays and sunlight decreases its efficacy, so the best approach is always to keep skin protected.

The best part about this product? It's super accessible and affordable, so you never have to think twice about enhancing your skincare routine.

This content was created by The Kit; RoC funded and approved it.

Fashion's big bang



As a slew of designer debuts brings fresh energy to the season, Leanne Delap explains why the runways are finally exciting again—for the first time in 30 years

Dedicated followers of fashion have been on the edge of their seats this season. There have been more than a dozen womenswear designer debuts in a massive game of European luxury-house musical chairs, from Bottega Veneta to Balenciaga, Versace to Chanel.

It has been a long dry spell for excitement in the front rows—30 years, in fact. Not since the mid-'90s heyday of artistic high-wires Alexander McQueen and John Galliano, and the propulsive pop cultural force of Tom Ford at Gucci has the runway lineup felt so relevant.

> When in doubt, shake things up. Fashion heads rolled.

Fashion has been in a rut for a few years. During the pandemic, people stuck at home turned to trophy treats as solace, but as the world opened back up, experiences became more valued than stuff. Then soaring costs of living ate away at everyone but the 1 per cent's bottom line. Luxury sales are in a slump and tariffs aren't going to help. The all-important accessories category lacks It-bag buzz, while influencers' unboxing videos of luxe goodies in shiny logo shopping bags have lost their lustre.

Customers are less willing to pay for enormous price hikes and feel quality is slipping. A new term for this phenomenon, "luxury ick," was coined by journalist Sujata Assomull. "Luxury is not in sync with what is going on in the world," she declared on Instagram.

When in doubt, shake things up. Duly, fashion heads rolled at the top and have been replaced with fresh ones—albeit predominantly male and white ones.

French-Belgian Matthieu Blazy, recently of Bottega Veneta, filled the biggest shoes at Chanel. Clues to a new ethos came from deeply casual front row guests: Nicole Kidman and her daughters, and Ayo Edebiri, the first Blazy-era Chanel ambassador, were all wearing jeans. Blazy's vision, presented amid a galaxy of planets, lowered the centre of gravity with low-slung waistlines and cropped boxy jackets in checks and the requisite tweeds. The effect was youthful and invigorating, as were the egg-shaped accessories. A literal rebirth?

In another major splash, Jonathan Anderson, the Irish designer who turned Spanish house Loewe into a major player, presented his first collection for Dior. His offering was wildly ambitious, touching on an unwieldy array of house signatures, from the bar suit (hipper, shorter and with floating volume from the cinched waist) to sculptural trapeze dresses, sweeping pleated gowns, exaggerated bustles and some notably average denim miniskirts. Oh, and loads of new bags and shoes, including a buzzy satin mule with rosettes and the Le Cigale bag made to look as if it were permanently open. Plus some funky tricorn hats for a little 18th century flair.

Italian Pierpaolo Piccioli, who had been at Valentino, is now at the helm at Balenciaga. The news cycle around the show was dominated by Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, attending the show in a New Balenciaga scarf-draped, wide-legged white suit. Volume is the message! Similarly, on the runway Piccioli offered a balanced homage to the past that looked very modern: sack dresses, ovoid coats, bold colours and textures.

Another big power move is Demna, the Georgia-born one-name wonder formerly of Balenciaga, taking over at Gucci. Rather than stage a typical fashion show, he presented a film directed by Spike Jonze that featured his new collection. He populated the premiere-cum-fashion-show with Hollywood royalty (Demi Moore, Gwyneth Paltrow, Elliot Page) wearing the new wares. The vibe was "young, hot and rich," meaning logos, sequins, pussy-bow blouses and loads of coveted bamboo-handled handbags tucked into the crook of the arm.

Proenza Schouler duo Lazaro Hernandez and Jack McCollough left their New York label for Loewe, debuting a sporty, energetic (read: young) twist full of colour pops and sleek fabrics (think scuba and sculpted leather).

Jamaica-born American designer Rachel Scott has been appointed successor at Proenza, an appointment met with excitement as it was one of only two major gigs that went to a woman; the other being British designer Louise Trotter at Bottega Veneta.

Trotter dug deep into the Italian label's artisanal traditions and wowed with transfixing jackets made of recycled fibre-glass that were fluffy like fur but danced in the light. She showed her signature off-shoulder gowns and incorporated the brand's famed intricato leather weave into all manner of items.

Yet more debuts to watch include American Michael Rider at Celine, Belgian Glenn Martens at Maison Margiela and Italian Dario Vitale at Versace.

After a buzzy suiting stunt at Venice, when both Julia Roberts and Amanda Seyfried wore the same outfit, Vitale's debut Versace show came out swinging. It was bold and colourful, a confident if polarizing return to the sexy styling of the late founder Gianni Versace. Vitale went through Gianni's personal archives for inspiration and came out with '80s- and '90s-flavoured clashing colours, cropped pants and tops, big jewellery and body con for day and night.

Will these new faces bring the heat back to fashion? The sheer number of changes has created a sense of rejuvenation, but standing out in this field is going to be a challenge. And there will be a lot of pressure on the shoulders of these new heads of houses to perform in a way that mends balance sheets fast.

Really, the last big fashion bang was in 1997. That year, Tom Ford introduced the G-string to Gucci, a brand he'd made pulsatingly hot with his jewel-toned satin and velvet '70s suiting.

Writer Joan Juliet Buck, then at Paris *Vogue*, called the 1997 spring haute couture season "a radical universe expansion." I was at those shows and witnessed the Alexander McQueen presentation for Givenchy that featured Shalom Harlow with a giant bird of prey laid upon her head, one wing wrapped across her face, and Naomi Campbell wearing golden ram's horns. It was universally panned at the time but has been recognized in retrospect as a gilded tour de force that turned the idea of couture on its head, skewering the savagery of consumerism and class.

Another highlight of '97 was Martin Margiela's revolutionary deconstructed Stockman collection, which stripped clothing down to the pattern pieces. It was also the year Raf Simons debuted, Hedi Slimane took over at Saint Laurent and Stella McCartney grabbed the reins from Karl Lagerfeld at Chloé.

But perhaps the most unforgettable moment was Comme des Garçons' "Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body," known as the "bump" collection for the way the body was distorted by goose-feather padding. One of the collections most represented in museums for its challenge to how we view the human body and the role of fashion, its show notes by Rei Kawakubo referenced "the absence of intent," which took me years to fully comprehend. My take is that she meant clothes in and of themselves do not hold meaning: How you wear and project them is what matters.

Other seasons had changed fashion before—Dior's New Look of 1948; the Paris arrival of Japanese design legends Rei Kawakubo, Yohji Yamamoto and Issey Miyake in 1980; the Antwerp Six in 1986. But what made 1997 special, and what the class of 2025 could benefit from, was the risk-taking.

Curator Alexandre Samson, who staged a 2023 exhibition in Paris called "1997 Fashion Big Bang" told I-D it was a year of "authenticity and independence. Not being afraid of being a freak—of being yourself, and not trying to please social media."

Of course, that's the main reason fashion is so different now. In 1997, images from the shows were taken by photographers at the end of the runway; these were then developed and sent to newspapers and magazines for publication months later as the clothing season began. There was time to create entire moods, and to digest them. The designers, production teams and models created entire worlds at elaborate venues; the experience of being there was powerful. Now, runway shows are overrun by iPhones, and the coverage is immediate, ubiquitous.

> Too many fresh ideas are lost in the scramble for virality.

While more people than ever can see the collections as they happen, flipping through these artistic presentations on a tiny screen minimizes their message. That, plus the extreme commodification of "It" items, placed on celebrities straight off (and even before) the runway, out of any storytelling context, has made fashion so boring for so long. There's too much merch, too much of the same merch, too many fresh ideas lost in the scramble for virality.

The freshman class of 2025 has an opportunity to turn the page on the muddled mess that fashion has become. Let's hope this is the moment when designers break free from the iron grip of likes and their conglomerate overlords' demands for ever-increasing margins. Now is a time when artists could really stand out by taking risks. Long live rule-breakers, convention benders and clothes that make us think.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES



BOTTEGA VENETA
The new designer: Louise Trotter
The must-see item: Recycled fibre-glass "fur" coats

At first glance, this jacket might read as Big Bird's big-city cousin—but once it moves, all thoughts of *Sesame Street* vanish. Louise Trotter turned recycled fibre-glass into a textural triumph. Consider it faux fur, refined.



CHANEL
The new designer: Matthieu Blazy
The must-see item: The grand finale dress

What happens when the polished Chanel girl loosens a few buttons on her iconic tweed blazer? You get a grand finale look that marries a crisp white silk tee with a couture-worthy skirt—and yes, it has pockets.

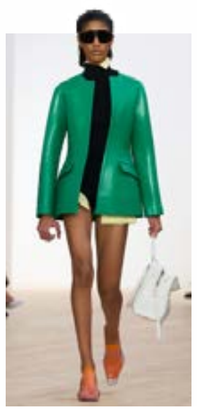


DIOR
The new designer: Jonathan Anderson
The must-see item: Satin-bow "D" sandals

Love it or hate it, everyone had an opinion on Jonathan Anderson's first Dior Womenswear collection. But what we can (hopefully) all agree on is how delightful these D-shaped satin sandals are. I'm always a sucker for pastel bows.

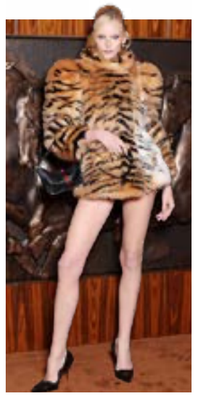
Double take

The Kit's style and social director, Annika Lautens, breaks down the season's highlights



LOEWE
The new designers: Jack McCollough and Lazaro Hernandez
The must-see item: Sculptural leather jackets

An unzipped scuba suit or a life-sized Polly Pocket ensemble? Let's call it a little bit of both. This opening look from Loewe captures everything the brand should be: loud, joyful and quirky, paired with impeccable craftsmanship.



GUCCI
The new designer: Demna
The must-see item: Double-G statement earrings

The once-viral double-G Gucci belt has shed its buckle and become a bold new accessory for your ears. Yes, it's still logo overload, but there's something about the '80s excess that feels very now. Like its predecessor, expect these earrings to be everywhere.



BALENCIAGA
The new designer: Pierpaolo Piccioli
The must-see item: The new sack dress

Pierpaolo Piccioli's signature unfussy femininity—so lauded at Valentino—has landed at Balenciaga, and, oh, how I've missed it. Opening with a wink to the iconic '60s sack dress, this look is quiet glamour meets elegant edge. All I can say? More, please.

On the scene

Street-style photographer Julia Spicer shares her top fashion month pics



Yoyo Cao at Loewe
The Singaporean creator showcased Loewe's new focus on colour and interesting use of leather.



Michelle Monaghan at Dior
The White Lotus star's pretty pink knit offset futuristic shades and a new Dior signature: a bow collar.



Agel Akol at Gucci
Calgary model Agel Akol wore the Gucci La Famiglia collection look "Miss Aperitivo."



Greta Lee at Dior
The new Dior ambassador looked fresh and cool in a floral shirt tied at the neck.



Natalia Vodianova at Loewe
The veteran supermodel's sweater and mini skirt with matching dog and cat print is just so cute.



Little Simz at Dior
I'm obsessed with the British rapper's green Dior coat, worn with white socks and black heels. It's modern but classic.



Lana Del Rey and her sister, Chuck, at Valentino
It was so sweet seeing them together and watching Lana take time to interact with her fans.



He Cong at Gucci
Demna presented his debut collection as a short film; the guests wore the looks. This pink gown speaks for itself!

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES (RUNWAY), JULIA SPICER (STREET STYLE)

THE KIT X DERMAPURE



HOW TO GET THE BEST LASER TREATMENT

We tested a gentle, glow-inducing laser at Dermapure

Choosing the right laser treatment and the right clinic can feel a lot like going shopping for a big event. You know the look you want, but sorting through the numerous options can feel, well, overwhelming.

It doesn't have to be. Take The Kit's recent visit to Dermapure, a nationwide network of clinics specializing in medically supervised aesthetic care, with more than 65 locations and close to 100 medical doctors across Canada. We met with a clinician, and after careful consideration, together we decided on a Clear + Brilliant laser to treat dark spots. From the consultation to the surprisingly gentle treatment to the detailed after-care, we knew we were in expert hands.

"You shouldn't be expected to be your own doctor or know what laser is best for you," says Dr. Beatrice Copps, a Toronto-based medical and cosmetic dermatologist at Dermapure. Unsure where to start? Visit dermapure.com to book a free consultation.

In the meantime, here's how our own experience went, and what we learned about how to get the best laser treatment.

1. Time your laser treatments to the season While there is no right or wrong age to get laser, there is a right time—and that time is now. "Fall is a logical time because people are recovering from summer and potential sun damage," says Dr. Copps. Also, come autumn, "you're not as likely to have as much sun exposure." That translates to safer recovery and better results.

Consider Clear + Brilliant. This laser comes in two wavelengths, and we went with the more superficial Perméa. It works by creating skin "micro-perforations" in a controlled setting, providing an exfoliation effect while spurring the skin to repair itself. The result: pigment spots essentially fall off. If we went to the beach right after getting lasered, we could get sun damage while our skin is trying to recover. Dr. Copps' rule of thumb? Only get laser when your complexion is as close as possible to your winter skin colour.

2. Age really is just a number "How old you are is not necessarily a main predictor for what treatments you need," explains Dr. Copps. The health of our skin is influenced by so many things, from genetics to environmental factors to stress and diet. But no matter what your concern, early intervention is key, says Dr. Copps. For example, the earlier you notice pigmentation and start targeting it, the easier it will be to stay on top of it.

3. Overnight fixes do not exist Our clinician, Marianne, kindly laughed when we joked about leaving the clinic looking 10 years younger. But the truth is, many laser treatments, including fractional lasers like Clear + Brilliant, aren't one and done. "When you're using a laser that will have little downtime, it requires more treatments to get a similar result," says Dr. Copps. On the plus side, we didn't have to hide out for a week while healing—instead, we looked a bit rosy for just a day or two. Depending on the laser and your skin type, treatment should be repeated up to six times, with sessions spaced four to eight weeks apart.

4. Do your research If someone does try to convince you that you'll have newborn skin after one treatment, run. Look for a clinic with medical oversight. Dermapure, for example, has a medical board, in addition to having a medical director in each clinic, as part of its commitment to safe, evidence-based aesthetic care. "We're not in the business of following trends. We want to make sure every treatment we do is science-backed," says Dr. Copps.

5. The best defence is a good offence Those dark spots the Clear + Brilliant laser sloughed off? Even though we've been diligent about sun care, that excess pigmentation was from years of damage and bad habits. "It's compounded," says Dr. Copps. "But the more you protect your skin, the less damage you're accumulating, and the less in-office maintenance you'll have to do." What does that protection look like? "Sunscreen, sunscreen, sunscreen," she says.

This content was created by The Kit; Dermapure funded and approved it.


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