

AMAZING LACE

*Sexy? Stuffy?
Taking fall's
frothy trend
for a ride.*
By OLIVIA
STREN



It's a still, hot evening in deepest summer, the slow-sinking sun is leaving a pink stain in a hazy sky, and I feel that I couldn't be more overheated if I were sporting a Saran Wrap catsuit for a sojourn in hell. Instead, I'm at Engine Gallery, on Queen Street West in Toronto, in a \$5,000 chocolate-brown Prada dress, feeling grateful for its natural air conditioning (it's full of racy, lacy holes). The canvas in front of me, named *Hello Dolly*, depicts a woman with a mottled and bruised complexion holding a pair of bowling balls up to her chest. The only comfort in this aggressively discomfiting portrait is that the woman looking back at me might possibly be upstaging me, displaying a more provocative look than my own. But the ball woman does not appear to be attracting the scandalized stares that I am.

It could be that the dress is seasonally ludicrous. (In order for this story to appear in this issue of *FASHION*, I have to test drive it in the middle of July.) Grape-nibbling gallery-goers in skinny jeans are looking at me with less curiosity and more open hostility. They seem irate that I should dare stand out. Toronto, even in a vogue-out nabe that prides itself on its big-city urbanity and avant-gardist plurality, can be weirdly conservative. Canadians in general have always favoured discretion, deeming any attention-grabbing uncouth. And as a woman in Acne jeans, an American Apparel tank and gladiator sandals gives me the hairy eyeball, I feel like the sort of strumpet who might have dared flash an ankle at a Dickens-era ball. »

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MAJA HADJUK; DRESS BY PRADA; SHOES BY NINE WEST; STYLING BY JORDAN PORTER; HAIR AND MAKEUP BY SHERI STROH FOR JUDY INC.

STELLA MCCARTNEY FALL 2008



But really, lace is this fall's favoured fabric, lending a femme-fatale allure to blouses, dresses, skirts and stockings. Stella McCartney's billowy lace frocks floated down the runway in shades of jet black and rain-cloud grey, while Alexander McQueen's multi-tiered dance dresses are rendered in knitted and cut-out black lace for an effect that's as delicate as it is menacing. Givenchy's short, black-lace dresses smoulder with the toreador chic of a blood-splattered Spanish drama, Philosophy di Alberta Ferretti's lacy confections look like the sort of seduction-ready robes Colette would have donned in her boudoir, and Rodarte's models traipsed the runway with gams in stockings that looked like cat-clawed spiderwebs. While lace is often associated with the frilly and feminine, this season's creations have a sexy severity, playing on tensions between the dark and the fragile.

The dress I'm wearing—bod-hugging, with a round neck and long sleeves—is as demure as it is scandalously revealing. Miuccia Prada had set eyes on a piece of lace, ignored it, then later decided to design her entire fall collection around it, sending the lace industry into a frenzy of production. "I thought using a little bit here and there is tacky, so we've had all of Switzerland working on couture lace. They're in shock," Prada told style.com. "When you are working on something simple, the surface is important. I wanted to do minimal, something that was feminine and strong—but in the end, not so sexy." A throwback to '90s Prada, what's enticing about the collection is this tension between the covered-up and the see-through. (To avoid qualifying for an R-rating disclaimer, the dress comes with its own bra and granny-like, navel-grazing undies that look loomed from Tensor bandage.)

ALEXANDER MCQUEEN FALL 2008



When I first donned the dress, a friend got an eyeful and asked me if I'd be awarded "danger pay" to wear it into the world. More outrageous, even, is the outfit's pièce de résistance: a bright-orange dickie, which I wore for about five minutes during the photo shoot. The photographer kept requesting I try to extend my neck, as the dickie seemed to cause the birth of an all-new staircase of chins. I was allowed to doff it after repeated complaints of laboured breathing.

En route to a resto, praying I'll manage the voyage incognito, I bump into a colleague and her husband. She pretends not to notice my getup, though she later tells me that she felt the outfit seemed a tad more mother-of-the-bridle than my usual style. Although, frankly, I don't know too many mothers who flash their underpants at their daughters' nuptials. Her husband, however, exclaims: "Holy shit! That is hot!" Emboldened by the compliment, I slink up to the bar and try to play the sort of woman who would think nothing of flaunting such an ensemble: maybe a Manhattan galierina out for a midnight tryst in Nolita. Over a plate of oysters and some bubbly—the only appropriate fare for such a look—a friend joins me. "It's a granny-like material, but has a modern silhouette. It's prudish and alluring at the same time. I love it!" she says. Now sailing on a happy sea of flattery, I find myself smitten with my inner curator. We clink flutes to a night of firsts and lasts: parading around in a transparent dress in downtown Toronto, sporting a dickie in a heat wave, and wearing anything worth five grand. Scandal always comes at a price. □



RODARTE FALL 2008



GIVENCHY FALL 2008

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER STIGTER