



Spring into Fashion

A schizophrenic fashion season means anything goes.

by Illysia Neumann-Loreck

TANGERINE VS. NEUTRAL

Each designer shows on average 35-50 looks in a collection, and they typically present their collections in a very cohesive manner. This season, however, the collections were a bit schizophrenic. Elie Tahari, Proenza Schouler and other designers featured smart, tailored pieces next to feminine, flirty styles. As always though, there were a few trends that shined through. Interestingly enough, the trends were quite opposite: Brights vs. neutrals, tailored vs. unstructured and soft florals vs. strong graphics. Here's your guide for what to wear this spring.

Pantone, the color experts, named Tangerine Tango as their color of the year for 2012, and they know what they're talking about! Tangerine was everywhere this season. This shade is flattering on many skin tones. Tangerine wasn't the only bright that shined during the spring collections. Grass green, turquoise and lemon yellow were also incorporated in the spring looks, but tangerine definitely won the popularity contest!

Neutrals were shown in the collections as a visual moment of quiet in between the bright colors and patterns of the season. Michael Kors strayed from his usual sophisticated American sportswear to give us a cohesive collection of safari looks with some animal prints thrown in for good measure. He must not have been at the meeting where the designers agreed to show feminine looks and bright colors along with the neutrals.



Left page: **Ralph Lauren** shows a soft look from his 2012 spring collection. This page clockwise from top left: **Elie Tahari** proves that tangerine can look very modern in this flowing dress with an asymmetrical hemline. Another modern silhouette in tangerine from **BCBG Max Azria**. **Michael Kors** khaki suede dress is very wearable for spring. This **Elie Tahari** look was part of the same collection as the look above it. It shows how great a soft, wrap top can look juxtaposed with tailored shorts.

SOFT FLORALS VS. TRIBAL GRAPHICS

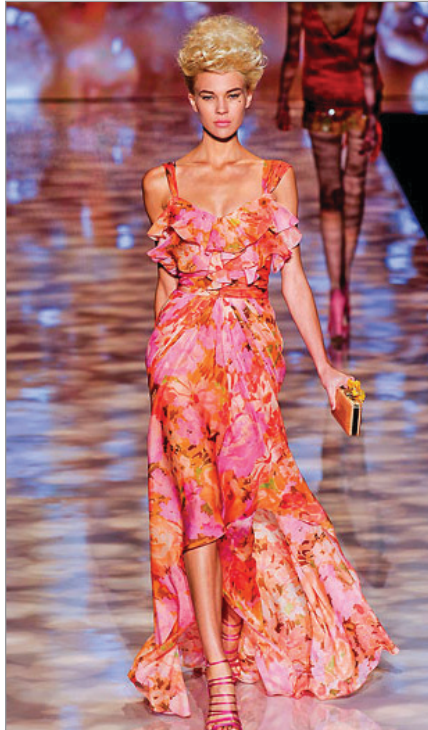
Soft florals in ultra-feminine silhouettes always make an appearance in the spring, and this year is no different. However, the romance of these looks comes not only from the flowers but also the flowing and feminine shapes.

Sometimes floral looks are quiet and whisper that spring is here. This spring, however, the flowers are soft, but the colors are not. They shout that winter is finally over. And I, for one, love that message!

Last spring, ikat print, a triangular pattern that originated in Indonesia, was all the rage. This season, designers once again looked far away for inspiration and came back with tribal graphics. The prints are not just limited to ikat-- many designers showed their patterns in black and white for a very modern interpretation.

Most of the time, ikat lends itself to a very bohemian vibe, not only because of the pattern but because it is used to make slouchy pants and oversized tops. In contrast, the sharp silhouettes shown this year are very sophisticated and very wearable.

Clockwise from top left: **Badgley Mischka**, the darlings of the red carpet, created a beautiful collection this season, including this ladylike dress with pink and orange painterly blossoms. **Nanette Lepore's** large-scale, flower print suit is a throwback to the 60s with its fitted top and full skirt, a flattering look on any woman. **Gwen Stefani**, designer of **L.A.M.B.**, created a beautiful chiffon layered dress with a pop of red on the slit and arm. **Donna Karan** also showed a tribal look with this bandeau dress. The pockets and pattern turn this frock from a prom dress into a thoroughly modern daytime dress.



TAILORED VS. UNSTRUCTURED



Tailored menswear suits walked the runway quite often this season with pants, shorts and skirts. Some seasons, the suit is broken up by pairing tops and bottoms of different fabrics or colors or patterns together. This season, the matchy-matchy look is back, and makes it much easier to get dressed in the morning!

The skirts and dresses in this trend are conservative and fitted or full-skirted and mid-knee length. They could have been worn by Grace Kelley or Audrey Hepburn 60 years ago, yet they still manage to look contemporary today.

Flowy styles lead to romance this season and are great in juxtaposition to the more tailored look. These free-flowing outfits are unstructured due to the use of soft fabrics such as silk, chiffon and lightweight knits in bold patterns and solids with the occasional neutral.



Pants and even blouses are cut looser for a feminine look and an unstructured silhouette. Diaphanous dresses in the collections are longer, designed with more fabric and layers for a flowing look. Again, the bold patterns and colors make the pieces very up-to-date.

Clockwise from top left: The blush color of this **Ralph Lauren** suit makes its tailored, menswear look more feminine. A colorblock sheath, also a trend this season, by **Carolina Herrera**, looks structured yet timeless. It's a dress that can be worn this season and ten years from now. **Carolina Herrera's** long chiffon tiered dress with a graphic pattern, part of the same schizophrenic but beautiful collection, is a flattering silhouette and will hide a multitude of sins. **Ralph Lauren** showed this unstructured white outfit for spring – a cardigan with a Mongolian lamb collar and a modern take on harem pants in silk with a silk charmeuse tank.

OTHER TRENDS



Asymmetrical hemlines, which are knee length in front and slightly longer in the back, showed up at quite a few collections this season. They are fashion's version of the mullet: business in the front and party in the back. But seriously, they are quite a versatile option for women because they are quite easy to dress down for day or dress up for evening.

Shorts were on trend last spring too, but this season they become a bit more formal, shown with matching jackets. It's a fun look that can be worn together or dressed down as separates.

The 1920s have been reincarnated this season, and they look just as fabulous in 2012 as they did in the past. Cloche hats ("Cloche" means bell in French, and the name implies the shape of this hat), long necklaces and soft, flowing chiffon and silk dresses gave a very "Great Gatsby" look to these clothes.

No matter what you wear this season (as long as it fits well and is flattering to your figure), you will be in style. It's a nice change from a few seasons ago where feathers were all the rage and to be seen as "in the fashion know," you had to resemble a canary. I'm all for this democracy of style. So enjoy the spring fashions without worrying about the latest, greatest outfit to buy this season, and focus on what will make you happy after this dreary winter is over.



Top row: Asymmetrical hemlines are all the rage this spring as seen in a flowered dress by **Diane Von Furstenberg** and a plaid dress by **Marc Jacobs**. Middle row: Shorts were trendy last spring, but this season they go a bit more formal with a jacket. Shown here is a tiger print short suit by **Proenza Schouler** and a more casual take on the trend by **L.A.M.B.** Bottom Row: The 1920s returned for a visit and fit right into the 21st century with modern fabrics. The knee-length chevron stripe dress is from **Alberta Ferretti**, and the white silk charmeuse dress with a cloche hat is from **Ralph Lauren**.

DESIGNER HOTSPOT: Is it art or is it fashion?



Mary Katrantzou (say that 10 times fast!), a 28-year-old designer from London, is known for her fabulous, completely unique and complex textiles. She started her own line of clothing in 2008, just a couple years out of design school, and hasn't looked back since. Her dresses look like elaborate Ming vases, Faberge eggs and perfume bottles come to life. She's now a household name in fashion circles and has garnered a celeb following including Keira Knightly, Catherine Zeta-Jones and Julianne Moore. For spring of 2012, Katrantzou channeled fine art into her garments. Each of her dresses looks like an original piece of art come to life ranging from Kandinsky to Monet. Her dresses are beautifully shaped and although the combination of complex silhouettes (one of her dresses featured a skirt that looked like a bell) and eye-catching designs could be too much, it works for her.

Katrantzou's dresses cost an average of \$1,500 and even though there's a financial crisis going on, they are consistently sold out. Women who can afford these expensive clothes buy a few, individual pieces that are very unique, rather than adding to their closet full of staples. And, people don't even have to leave their mansions to buy them. Katrantzou's line can be ordered from luxe websites such as Net-a-Porter and Moda Operandi.

Large photo: **Keira Knightly** is a big fan of **Mary Katrantzou's** designs and has worn her unique dresses to numerous events. Inset photo: A photo of **Mary Katrantzou**, just a few years out of design school, hard at work on one of her designs.