Patou’s rather rounded renaissance

By Godfrey Deeny - 26 September 2019

Patou made its return to the Paris season after a three-decade hiatus with a revival of relaxed ladylike style, ready-to-wear with a surprisingly couture touch.

Unveiled in its new headquarters on Île de la Cité, within sight of Notre Dame, in a presentation where creative director Guillaume Henry toured the space, talking editors through the collection.

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Patou for me is joyful, Parisian and easy to wear. I did not want a big theme, but a wardrobe for women I know and work with,” enthused Henry, who joined Patou after busy stints at Nina Ricci and Carven.

What worked best were the denim jackets covered in silver metal patchwork icons of Patou’s past, like its perfume flacons, worn with cotton bubble skirts; or great globe-shaped lace frocks. Lots of elements finished with oversized, decorative golden disc buttons.

It all did have quite a bourgeois tint; from the kissing pink pantsuits with crepe de chine blouse to the yacht club blazers with braid, yet it all came across as a clever take on French downtown elegance – and highly focused commercially.

Somewhat oddly, there were two collections on display – the fall pre-collection seen on four models as one entered, featuring flirty cotton frocks in a mustard-hued Etruscan warrior print; wide dark denim pants with mega roll-ups; and neat skirts whose hems sprouted feathers. Busy modern Parisian with a hint of couture shapes – all anchored with a great series of lace boxer boots, courtesy of a link-up with Le Coq Sportif.
“I asked myself, what are our sneakers? And the answer was, I wanted a glove for the foot,” chuckled Henry.

It’s been a very careful re-launch. Patou may be owned by LVMH, but it is run as start-up, albeit with a charming headquarters in a neo-Gothic building. Though with a mere 3,500 square-foot of space, for a staff of 30.

The first steps have been positive, with some 60 boutiques and department stores ordering Henry’s debut collection – due to hit shelves in November at Galeries Lafayette in Paris.

“Jean Patou dressed Suzanne Lenglen and Josephine Baker. He also dated Louise Brooks. So it’s about ease and couture, with a pell-mell of inspiration. I know the history of Jean Patou backwards. But I didn’t want to follow the archive but express the man, who was a lover of literature,” expounded Henry.

Standing beside one t-shirt that read Serendipity, along with the meaning – *(n.)* to find something good without looking for it* – part of a series of explanatory wordy tops that will roll out in drops.