Ralph Lauren's sky-high tribute to New York

By Roxanne Robinson - 23 March 2022

HBO's *The Gilded Age* has been a sleeper hit since it debuted in late January as a fantasy romp imagining life of the well-to-do in New York City in the late 1800s. While he was looking to a different period in New York, more aptly the Jazz Age when skyscrapers took over the skyline, Ralph Lauren similarly swept his audience away to a bygone era of elegance in the Big Apple for his Fall 2022 collection.

Lauren chose a location that symbolized powerful art patrons of the era. Founded by Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, Lillie P. Bliss, and Mary Quinn Sullivan, the Museum of Modern Art or MoMA opened days after the Wall Street crash of 1929. It ended up in its current location by 1939.

A gallery on the sixth floor was turned into Lauren's living room. At least the slick black-and-white one with Art Deco club chairs, black lacquer tables, white sectionals with plenty of red roses, coffee table books, and brand signature bowls of M&M's. Faux-illuminated windows depicted the tall building skyline in black and white. Artsy images of cars owned by Lauren hung on the walls (one PR rep quipped they weren't permanent fixtures to the museum, "yet").

Once the show began—Gigi Hadid dressed in a black sweater-and-trouser ensemble opened—it soon became evident the models were cued to interact and make eye contact with the intimate audience. Lauren held two shows, 6 p.m. and 8 p.m., to accommodate the small venue. In a black-and-white color palette with a pop of red on occasion, the designer sent out looks that harkened that Gatsby-era that has always been a part of the brand's DNA.
To that end, there were day and night versions of the classic color combo with his greatest hits; men's suiting for all in wool; everything from glen plaids, pinstripes, pocket-squared and worn with black-and-white brogues or fashioned into a halter evening dress complete with white tie. The elegance heated up for night with body-clinging sheath gowns; one call-out was a black one embroidered with crystals in the shape of the Manhattan skyline.

While no self-respecting tony New Yorker would dream of weekend-ing in the city, Lauren offered some sporty buffalo plaids, and alpine motifs to the mix for cabin or après-ski looks. A fair isle shetland sweater tucked into a long tulle skirt revealing riding boots in the slits was particularly cool and particularly Ralph Lauren.

Memory lane also harkened back to models associated with the house, such as Shalom Harlow, Laetitia Casta, Tyson Beckford, and sisters Gigi and Bella Hadid. The models varied in age and ethnicity—if not in size—a nod to New York City's melting pot of multi-cultures.

The show closed with a look that would seem to hold a special place for Lauren, born and raised in the Bronx. A model appeared with a customized baseball bomber jacket and NY Yankees baseball cap, the team whose famous stadium is also in the Bronx. Nothing like a bit of baseball to drum up even more nostalgia, especially in the Big Apple.

Leaving the 54th street venue heading down Fifth Avenue, a different New York emerges with empty boarded-up storefronts. This day, the Daily News headline was 'Guns Gone Wild in City' thanks to 29 shootings, one fatal, over the past weekend. Evidence the subway stabbings aren't so farfetched is a clearly mentally ill passenger shouting on the 53rd street train platform. Ralph is on to something. We are all eager for the elegant, sophisticated New York, whose ills at least were once better concealed.

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