The Fashion Calendar

FROM THE CATWALK TO THE STORE
"That Chanel back bag, the skirt and OMG look at that pink clutch! I want it, and I want it now". Let’s be honest, those are the first thoughts coming up in your mind while looking at the most breathtaking catwalk shows of the season. We love to watch the new collections via livestream, Snapchat or Instagram. But honestly, have you ever seen those collection pieces in store after watching those beautiful shows?

I will never forget the moment I visited the AW16 catwalk show of the London-based Korean designer Eudon Choi in February 2016. A journalist came up to me and asked: “When will this collection actually arrive in store? It always takes so long.” I politely responded: “This show is the AW16 collection, so it will arrive in store next autumn, madam, I think around September.” Thinking to myself, “have you not read the invitation? If you had, you could have read yourself this is the catwalk show of the AW16 collection. And on top of that, all the shows that are presented this fashion week are AW16 shows and will arrive next autumn, you should know!” After this weird situation, I started to daydream about the fashion calendar. Is it actually that logical for everyone when a particular collection will arrive in store? I realised that the question the lady asked me was not that weird after all.

Let’s talk fashion calendar. What is this abstract thing? How did it start, and why?

In 1944, Ruth Finley launched the first fashion calendar, putting together all of the week’s events into one extensive guide; one week in September, when the spring/summer collections were presented, and the other one in February, when the fall/winter collections were presented. This brought together all facets of the fashion and beauty industries, including buyers, manufacturers, designers, and editors around a single itinerary.

Fashion week was developing fast. In The United States, the importance of fashion design grew a lot. In 1962 Eleanor Lambert continued to revolutionize the industry when she formed the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA), which still exists. Nowadays, the powerful fashion designer Diana von Furstenberg is the president of this CFDA.

Designers continued showcasing their collections twice a year, in September and February, in an event that would eventually become known as New York Fashion Week. Other cities caught on, with Paris starting its own fashion week in 1972, Milan in 1975, and London following in 1984.

When looking more closely at the fashion weeks’ time schedule between the very beginning of the fashion calendar and the 21st century, the resort and pre-fall shows are added. So an important thing that has changed, is that there are more fashion weeks, more collections, and more store arrivals.

Fashion week still showcases the upcoming season’s prêt-à-porter clothing during catwalk shows and show presentations. Key people who visit fashion week include designers, models, journalists, and buyers from stores around the world, fashion stylists, bloggers and celebrities. This event is an important moment within the calendar of the fashion industry. The presented collections are delivered to stores and available for consumers to buy four to six months later. So, the things we admire during the shows do arrive in store. However, the timing can be questioned. Several designers like Christopher Bailey and Tom Ford gave their opinion, and are therefore planning to change this timing.
Christopher Bailey, the creative director of Burberry stated: “There’s just something that initially feels wrong when we’re talking about creating a moment in fashion: you do the show in September and it feels really right for that moment, but then you have to wait for five or six months until it’s in the store. Was it that moment, or was it the moment at the show, that felt really right?”

Tom Ford said: “In a world that has become increasingly immediate, the current way of showing a collection four months before it is available to customers, is an antiquated idea that no longer makes sense. We have been living with a fashion calendar and system that is from another era.”

Not only Tom Ford and Burberry are planning to change their timing and fashion calendar. Lots of brands, like Michael Kors and Tommy Hilfiger, are following.

The timing, something so important in fashion, will change because of these brands. 2016 will be The Year of the Changing Fashion Calendar. But talking about this shift in moments and timing. What will actually change? And what is the most important cause?

Let’s start with the fact that every brand is different; even before the changing fashion calendar became the topic of discussion. All luxury fashion brands have their own way of working, and therefore their own strategy. Some brands are producing only two collections per year, for example, while others choose to produce four collections or even more. But those luxury fashion brands did have one thing in common; it took them ages before collections arrived in store.

Looking at it from our point of view, we can carefully admit that we want a collection to be available immediately after a fashion show, not four to six months later, right? Remember the clutch I told you about in the beginning? But the interesting question is: what has changed from the very beginning of the fashion calendar, to the 21st century that we are living in? Do we not want to wait anymore? Who were those patient customers back then?

As Tom Ford describes it: “Today, our customers want a collection that is immediately available. Fashion shows and the traditional fashion calendar, as we know them, no longer work in the way that they once did. Showing the collection, as it arrives in stores, will remedy this, and allow the excitement that is created by a show or event to drive sales and satisfy our customers’ increasing desire to have their clothes as they are ready to wear them.”

So, Tom Ford agrees. Research suggests the cause why we, customers of the 21st century, do not want to wait anymore. It is very simple, and quite funny actually: customers did not have to wait then. They were only able to see the collection when it arrived in store. There was no Snapchat, which created a whole backstage preview of the show, like Michael Kors does. There was no Instagram that showed every look of the catwalk, like Balmain does. And there was no style.com where every show got published; there was no Internet at all. Nowadays, digital communication tools make it possible for the fashion industry to share collection launches, fashion weeks, events, whatever they wish for, worldwide, within seconds. So that makes sense.
So the question is, why does it take so long for a collection to arrive in store? Is it because that’s just the fashion calendar rule, as Ruth Finley launched in 1944? The answer is no. It is a bit more complex than just a calendar that once was put together. What do you think about the manufacturers that have a tight schedule, or the suppliers that have to arrange all fabrics and trims, or all retailers that have a planning in selling dates? It is not only about the fashion brands choosing to go left or right; it is a giant puzzle that has to fit perfectly in order to gain success.

But again, every brand is different. So also within this situation, different luxury fashion brands, react in their own possible way. Three different possibilities for how to use the fashion calendar in the future have arisen.

Possibility one is to go all the way. See now, buy now is the new strategy, wherein the showed collections on the runways are immediately available in store. Examples of luxury fashion brands, which are using this fashion calendar, are Burberry and Tom Ford.

Possibility two is to go for the in between road. A part of the collection, like a few particular bags, a few special dresses, or a few outfits of the runway collection will be available immediately after the show. However, the main collection will not be available for a few months. Brands like Prada and Michael Kors have chosen for this option.

The last possibility is just to stick to the original way of showing the collection, which will be available in store four to six months later. Luxury fashion brands like Eudon Choi, and Chanel keep using this original system.

None of these possibilities are wrong or right. Every fashion brand is different. It chooses, or even has to choose due to partnerships with manufacturers or suppliers, an own way of working. What do you think is the best one? And which one do you like the most? Or is there another even stronger possibility?