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Theyskens' Theory FALL 2011 RTW



Photo: Marcio Madeira/firstVIEW

Last week's first drop of the Theyskens' Theory collection had fashion fanatics scrambling to grab their first-ever chance to possess an affordable piece of a designer whose work for Rochas and Nina Ricci was once an unattainable fantasy. Today, the follow-up debut runway collection made more breaking news as a much-anticipated addition to New York Fashion Week: the first plain-view sighting of what can happen when a high-end European designer signs up to American contemporary. "It's the way I wanted my career to go, and I'm really happy with the result," said Olivier Theyskens, pointing out that the real mental gear-shift for him has been thinking in terms of separates. "I didn't sketch. No drawings, just making separates to play with and combine in a wardrobe."

The result? Still recognizably Theyskens, but tilted toward the gritty, Belgian end of the spectrum—that slightly dark, grime-tinged look, shown on the same kind of the attenuated wraiths he brought to Paris as a 20-year-old in 1997. Which, as it happens, is exactly the year Andrew Rosen was founding Theory in New York.

What the partnership is making possible is a strong range of Theyskens's tailoring—his skinny-leg flares translated into cords and denim in innovative faded washes, as well as reiterations of the strong-shouldered, notch-back jackets and sweeping maxi-coats which marked him out from the start (the matte pony-skin coat in a dull burgundy being the star). Meanwhile, plaid flannel shirts and long slouchy skirts—some in an abstracted blanket print—made a glancing reference to American grunge style, a theme bubbling under the surface in New York this week.

As a symbolic announcement of the opening of an era when a high-end designer can unite with a mass manufacturer in something far more concrete than a fleeting one-off "collab," this collection is, in its way, historic. Though not entirely perfect—it could have done with a larger dose of the optimistic color than the single shot Theyskens showed in one pair of orange neon pants, for instance—this is a relationship which seems set to change the fashion landscape, long-term.