



LACE UP

As LACE continues its REIGN as fashion's FABRIC DU JOUR, BAZAAR examines its RICH past, the DESIGNERS offering a FRESH TAKE on this MOST ANCIENT and PRIZED of TEXTILES and its very PROMISING FUTURE

words TESS DE VIVIE DE RÉGIE

Photography: Priscilla Grant (Robbie); Abaca Press (Johnson);
Doug Peters (Kravitz); Nina Prommer (Lee), all/Alamy.

By this point, even the most casual observer of trends would have noticed that lace is everywhere right now. Lace-trimmed slip dresses, skirts and camisoles have dominated street style at recent fashion weeks, while on runways, the traditional motif has been infused with a decidedly of-the-minute, sometimes even subversive, energy.

At Schiaparelli Spring Couture 2026, a presentation inspired by the eternal beauty of the Sistine Chapel, lace was paired with crin in a sharply shouldered, peplum-waisted sheer matching jacket and skirt suit, and in a bustier dress whose Chantilly lace skirt bled from black to orange in a 'sfumato' effect, a nod to the haze-like technique beloved by Renaissance painters. For Valentino Spring 2026 Couture, Alessandro Michele dipped into '20s showgirl iconography with

would complicate that story a little by saying that there are also indigenous North American and Central American laces," continues Johnson, citing the Yaxchilan lintels from the eighth century, one of which depicts "a very wealthy Mayan woman who's wearing this exquisite huipil [traditional Mayan tunic] that is nothing but lace".

"The earliest laces, especially the early needle laces coming out of Flanders, Brussels and Germany, were very much meant to be visible demonstrations of wealth," says Johnson. Such creations were often fashioned by multiple hands, with particularly valuable pieces representing thousands of hours of work. "How you emphasise the quality of your person is by having a very starched or crisp white lace," notes Johnson. Lace was predominantly used as a trimming or to edge clothing. "Think Queen Elizabeth [I] in those wonderful lace collars that are standing up." Then, of course, there is the time-honoured

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a diaphanous, jade-green cape dress edged with lace and set off with a solar crown. In their recent collections, Alexander McQueen, Zimmermann and Tom Ford have all also partaken in the trend.

Greta Lee, freshly announced as a Dior ambassador, wore an ethereal, embroidered silver lace gown from Jonathan Anderson's debut for the house to the October 2025 premiere of *Tron: Ares*. Dakota Johnson chose a sheer, heavily tiered lace number from Chloé's Fall 2025 collection for the Red Sea Film Festival last December. Zoë Kravitz stepped out at the Golden Globes in January in a floor-length, salmon-pink Saint Laurent slip dress trimmed with lace at the décolleté and hem, before donning a micro version of the same for an after-party later that night.

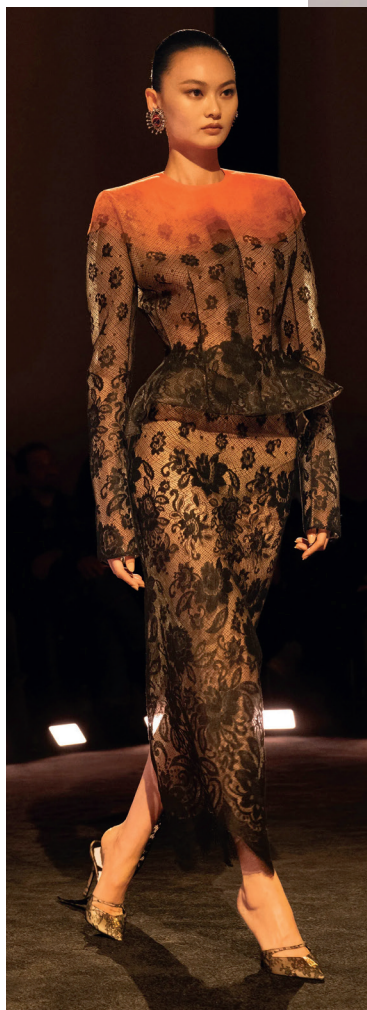
"Most histories of [the origin of] lace are firmly grounded in the 16th and 17th centuries in Western Europe," shares Laura Johnson, curator of costumes and textiles at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, an institution that holds some 6000 pieces of lace from across the globe. "But I

association between lace and bridalwear, originating from Queen Victoria's 1840 wedding dress, which is also credited with popularising white for the occasion. Her cream silk satin gown was embellished around the neckline and sleeves with Honiton lace, a variety of bobbin lace hailing from Devon.

Johnson credits Madonna with "[revolutionising] the 'innerwear as outerwear' that we now take for granted, that we see walking the red carpet every day". In the '80s, the singer adopted a lace-heavy wardrobe that included fingerless and elbow-length gloves and sheer bodices and corsets that infused a rebellious energy into the fabric.

Prince wore a high-necked lace shirt adorned with ruffles and accessorised with matching gloves throughout his 1984-85 Purple Rain tour. "He took a lot of those cultural markers and turned them into his own ways of questioning and representing gender and self in fascinating ways," notes Johnson. "[He] was wearing a lot of lace, a lot of cravats – very 18th-century, when men could dandy it up and weren't questioned about it."

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Dakota Johnson at the Red Sea Film Festival in December 2025 wearing Chloé Fall 2025; Zoë Kravitz at the 83rd Golden Globes in January wearing a custom Saint Laurent gown; Margot Robbie at the *Wuthering Heights* premiere in LA in January wearing custom Schiaparelli; Greta Lee at the *Tron: Ares* premiere in October 2025 wearing Dior Spring 2026.



In the early 19th century, lacemakers from Nottingham emigrated to northern France, bringing with them the skills and technology to craft lace on a ‘Leavers’ loom, an early lacemaking machine produced during the Industrial Revolution. Today, the French cities of Caudry and Calais still boast a thriving machine lace industry.

In 2016, Chanel acquired a minority stake in the parent company of Sophie Hallette, the lace- and tullemaking house founded in 1887 whose lace is used by, among others, Schiaparelli, Gucci and Louis Vuitton.

“Chanel is the top of the top – they know how to use [lace],” offers Anne-Claire Laronde, chief curator and director of the museums of the city of Calais, which encompasses the renowned Cité de la Dentelle et de la Mode (CDM), or Museum of Lace and Fashion.

Other producers include Solstiss, whose work is used by Chloé and Valentino. Both Sophie Hallette and Solstiss produced lace that appeared on the Princess of Wales’ Alexander McQueen wedding gown and both are classed as Entreprises du Patrimoine Vivant, or Living Heritage Companies.

Iris van Herpen – the subject of a 2013 solo exhibition at the CDM – is radically expanding the scope of lacemaking, incorporating 21st-century technologies like 3D-printing and laser-cutting. Van Herpen’s 2021 ‘Roots of Rebirth’ Haute Couture collection, a meditation on the magic of fungi and “the miraculous lacery of interconnectedness from the natural ‘wood wide web’”, included the ‘Hensis’ dress, for which fine slices of lace were heat-bonded to laser-cut spores that fanned out in mushroom-like gills.

In 2024, the CDM held the first monographic exhibition of avant-garde Japanese designer Yuima Nakazato, who also lays claim to being the only Japanese guest member of Paris’ Haute Couture week. “What was very interesting with him was [that] he was thinking of [sustainable] solutions for the industrial textile industry,” says Laronde. Nakazato’s Autumn/Winter 2024-5 Couture presentation, entitled ‘Unveil’, featured lace crafted from Brewed Protein fibre, a plant-based, fermented textile invented by Japanese bio-venture Spiber, devised to produce lower levels of greenhouse gases than animal-derived equivalents.

Fashion’s renewed appetite for lace comes, perhaps not unsurprisingly, against a steady stream of adaptations of Victorian literary classics and gothic-coded productions, of which TV series *Wednesday* and films *Nosferatu* (2024), *Frankenstein* (2025) and this year’s *Wuthering Heights* have made particularly significant sartorial splashes. Margot Robbie made a strong argument for method dressing throughout her *Wuthering Heights* ‘moorcove’ press tour wardrobe, which featured no small quantity of lace.

We’re currently enjoying a “handmade lace renaissance”, suggests Johnson, via lace guilds across the world that bring together hobbyists and experts alike to “make an ancient art form contemporary”. Australian artist Maggie Hensel-Brown, whose work has been collected by Sydney’s Powerhouse Museum and The Denver Art Museum in Colorado, applies an irreverent lens to needle lace, stitching laptops, crosswords and nude female figures into her creations. And for apprentices looking to enter the industry professionally, the CDM has, since 2020, offered a vocational lacemaking course.

Having acquired manifold connotations over the course of half a millennium, lace can be – among other things – delicate, dowdy, subversive or refined, depending on the particular vantage point of its beholder. What exactly does it symbolise for those embracing the resurgence of lace in 2026? “It can be as traditional, as avant-garde, as challenging or as safe as you want it to be,” reflects Johnson. “That’s one of the beauties of lace – it can do all of those things.” HB

THIS PAGE FROM TOP Fendi Fall 2026; Schiaparelli Spring 2026 Couture; Dolce & Gabbana Fall 2026. OPPOSITE PAGE Look 13 from Iris van Herpen’s Fall 2022 couture collection, Meta Morphism.

Photography: courtesy of GoRunway.

