

COMMERCE

## What's next for high fashion's free agents?

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*Illustration of Lanvin's Alber Elbaz*

By STAFF REPORTS

After their departures from Christian Dior and Lanvin, the fashion industry is buzzing with anticipation for what's next for the careers of Raf Simons and Alber Elbaz.

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While their exits from their respective fashion houses differ greatly, with Mr. Simons stepping down at Dior for personal reasons and Mr. Elbaz being ousted after directional differences at Lanvin, the industry eagerly awaits their creative return. What the future holds for each designer will be interesting as the stresses of the fashion calendar become increasingly clear as creative directors step down.

Fashion is in need of a crystal ball

In October 2015, Mr. Simons ended his three-and-a-half year tenure as artistic director of women's wear at Dior.

While his departure was amicable, Mr. Simons cited personal reasons in addition to not meeting eye-to-eye on a new contract as reasons for stepping down. Mr. Simons has also said he would like to focus more attention on his namesake line.

The spring/summer 2016 runway show was his last for the house ([see story](#)).

Dior's spring 2016 couture show, presented on Jan. 25, was the first collection to be shown without Mr. Simons since 2012. Dior has relied on in-house designers Serge Ruffieux and Lucie Meier to continue its "legacy of offbeat femininity," per [Refinery29](#).



*Raf Simons, Dior & I documentary still*

Although Mr. Ruffieux and Ms. Meier are established in the luxury fashion world, Dior has not expressed any

urgency to promote either designer or hire someone from outside the house.

Rumors currently suggest that Mr. Simons has a tentative appointment at U.S. fashion label Calvin Klein. Although a creative director position at Calvin Klein seemingly contradicts Mr. Simons' reasons for leaving Dior, this would put him in a top role at the iconic fashion brand.

If the rumors prove true, the appointment would not be activated for a few years, as Mr. Simons' Dior contract has a non-compete agreement. Most recently, Mr. Simons showed his namesake label's fall/winter 2016 collection during Paris Fashion Week on Jan. 21.

Mr. Elbaz's exit from Lanvin was slightly messier than Mr. Simons' departure from Dior.

After announcing his resignation just days after Mr. Simons, it was assumed by the industry that Mr. Elbaz's departure was amicable, after working at the house for 14 years. But it became clear in the days following that Mr. Elbaz was forced out by Lanvin's owner Shaw-Lan Wang after directional tensions surfaced ([see story](#)).

In a case similar to Dior, Lanvin has yet to announce a replacement for Mr. Elbaz, causing internal strife at its atelier in Paris.

Due to the unexpectedness and terms of Mr. Elbaz's departure from Lanvin, there is immense curiosity as to what the designer is planning to do next. When Mr. Elbaz first left Lanvin, rumors flew that he would take over the position left vacant by Mr. Simons, but talks have since died down.



*Portrait of Alber Elbaz*

The New York Times' Vanessa Friedman, in addition to Marigay McKee, formerly of Saks Fifth Avenue, and Only the Brave president Renzo Rosso, to name a few, have publicly expressed the support of Mr. Elbaz beginning his own line.

Ms. Friedman cited Ralph Toledano, the president of Fédération Française de la Couture, du Prêt-à-Porter des Couturiers et des Créateurs de Mode, who told her, of Mr. Elbaz, "It was always his own vision. At Lanvin, what he did was Alber Elbaz for Lanvin. At Guy Laroche, it was Alber Elbaz for Guy Laroche. Now he should just do Alber Elbaz."

At this time, Mr. Elbaz is not sharing what he has in the works.

But as Ms. Friedman [summarized](#), "Fashion is so dominated by heritage brands and established names that when great talents become free agents, it's hard not to fantasize about them founding their own brand and creating the Great Maison of the Future, instead of trying to fit themselves into the box of an already determined aesthetic, no matter how beautiful that box may be."

Indeed, starting a new label requires a lot of capital, as is evident with Tamara Mellon ([see story](#)). Moreover, since both designers are high-profile there will be higher expectations from retailers, critics and consumers for the four collection cornerstone in addition to retail stores.

To this point, it is logical for designers to move from house to house during their careers as the logistical foundation is already established. But perhaps Mr. Simons and Mr. Elbaz will reposition the establishment's current status quo.

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