

PARIS FASHION WEEK

Dior's new

BEN MENDELSON SHINES ON
SCREEN AND IN PERSON AT NONE
OTHER THAN PARIS FASHION WEEK

Kerry Parnell

‘P’aris is couture and couture is Paris,” declared Christian Dior, as echoed by Ben Mendelsohn as the famous designer, in Apple TV’s new series, *The New Look*. And the Aussie actor is certainly enjoying the glamour, as he launches the series in the fashion capital.

Insider caught up with the star of the stylish new series, in Paris, where Mendelsohn, 54, is in a jubilant mood.

“It was a real honour to play Christian Dior,” he says, adding, “But it’s a lot of pressure in front of the home crowd. I hope they approve.”

The show follows the life of Christian Dior during and after World War II, when Paris emerged from Nazi occupation. In 1947, he began a fashion revolution with his “New Look” – a silhouette of wide skirts and nipped-in waists – which transformed women’s fashion around the world. “All I ever wanted to do, was design the most beautiful women’s clothing that ever existed,” Mendelsohn as Dior says.

The creator of the series, Todd Kessler, worked with the Melbourne-born actor on the drama *Bloodline* and so cast the talented Aussie in the role of one of the most famous Frenchmen of all time, opposite Juliette Binoche as Coco Chanel.

The series looks sumptuous, but does not shy away from how the two designers traversed the war, including Chanel colluding with the Germans. It has met with divided reviews, but Kessler is keen to point out real life is never black and white.



Australian actor Ben Mendelsohn; and, left and at far right, runway models in the Dior Autumn/Winter 2024 Collection at Paris Fashion Week.

“It’s interesting it’s got people talking,” he says. “People today want to know who are the goodies and baddies, but this is real life. People were just trying to survive.”

Kessler, 52, spent seven years bringing it to the screen, inspired after reading a book about Dior’s life. And during the 80th anniversary year of D-Day, he says we could all learn from the period.

“I would ask in watching the show to understand how lucky we all are not to be living in that time,” he says, “and to have compassion and think about what you would do if you were in their shoes. Thinking about that could potentially lead us to a better place in the world we are in today.”

Dior was superstitious and put a lot

of faith in the idea of luck. And certainly, Mendelsohn is embracing his good fortune on finding himself in the world of high fashion, proudly sporting a blue shearling Dior coat he splashed out on, which he described as “the best f---ing jacket ever”.

“Ah, but this is the real deal,” he says, deferring to the label’s creative director, Maria Grazia Chiuri, standing by his side.

The following day, Mendelsohn and his coat, along with *Game of Thrones*’ Maisie Williams, who plays his sister Catherine, plus *Insider*, get to experience the Dior Autumn/Winter 2024 Collection at Paris Fashion Week.

Held in the Tuileries, a huge crowd presses around the entrance to the

From old-fart fashion to Dior runways, dahling

Kerry Parnell



Want to know the secret to feeling good? Dress up. “You are very well-dressed,” the French customs officer declared as I passed through border control

on my way to Paris, this week. “Oh, merci,” I stuttered, confused. I walked off pondering if he was a) being sarcastic, or b) speaking to the person behind me. But mais non, he actually meant it. Harried old chook, me, usually to be found in jeans, no make-up and rubbish hair, failing to combine working from home with jobs like remembering to collect my kids from school.

The reason for the unusual

compliment was because I was travelling in disguise – dressed as someone who actually cared about what they looked like and didn’t spend most of their week at a desk in the attic, sporting slippers. And do you know what? It felt brilliant.

I had been tasked with attending Paris Fashion Week and initially my first thought was, naturally, what on earth would I wear? I had to seriously up my style game and locate, from the recesses of my cupboard and mind, the put-together person I once was.

Don’t get me wrong, I do regularly leave my house to interview people and manage to rustle up things like shoes, but Paris Fashion Week was a whole other level.

As, ahem, “several” years have passed since I was office-based, which have taken their toll on both my wardrobe and my face, I concluded my old-



The stylish Kerry Parnell in Paris for Fashion Week. Picture: Getty

fart fashion future would now be all about quality fabrics. If you feel nice, you look nice. So, with this in mind, I plumped for fancy pants, silk shirt, blazer and even knotted a little silk scarf around my neck.

I hardly recognised myself – but this style stranger had an absolute blast. It felt wonderful to dress up and play Parisian for a few days, tottering about and eating croissants. But most of all, making such an effort, was extremely uplifting, mentally.

Who knew? Well, lots of people, it seems. Playing dress-up is a thing, from Barbie screenings to Taylor Swift concerts. Aussie stadiums were full of mother-daughter combos clad in sequins, having the time of their lives. It makes sense: you simply can’t be in a bad mood if you are literally sparkling company.

As Swifties have known for

years, getting dressed-up is good for your mental health. “Dopamine dressing” – wearing smart clothes, or bright colours – can significantly improve your outlook. “Clothing is linked to our self-esteem,” explains performance and confidence coach Olivia James. “It’s surprising how much of a boost you get from wearing something well-cut. You are sending a signal to yourself and the world that you take care of yourself, that you matter and that you don’t want to hide.”

Stylist Abbey Booth agrees. “I firmly believe personal style is a kindness to yourself, it’s a beautiful form of self-care, expression and compassion,” she says. “Clothes are integral to our confidence, self-esteem and how we show up to the world.”

In other words, bling it on.

SPOTLIGHT **insider**

look is a hit



Ben Mendelsohn and David Kammenos in character in the film *The New Look*, now streaming on Apple TV+

purpose-built pavilion, trying to catch a glimpse of the big names, including Jennifer Lawrence, Elizabeth Debicki and Natalie Portman, but the biggest of all are the K-pop sensations, Blackpink's Jisoo and Seventeen's Mingyu. At the sight of Jisoo, in a Dior blazer, shirt, shorts, plaits and long socks, the fans collectively lose their minds and begin screaming.

Also there, are Alexa Chung, Kelly Rutherford and Olivia Palermo, everyone uber-chic in long coats, suits and Dior's trademark gowns. It's an experience in itself just getting into the show, but inside, all is tranquil, as the guests – a mixture of celebrities and ambassadors, press, buyers and clients, are seated around a central installation by Mumbai artist

Shakuntala Kulkarni. Towering cane "cages" of the female form are arranged to represent the "versatility and strength of femininity".

Dior is famous for its pared-back elegance and adherence to the label's heritage. Christian Dior's timeless "silhouette a la Parisienne," is reinterpreted each season, in the form of crisp white shirts, black skirts and tailored jackets.

This season, it is all about 1960s Dior, when Marc Bohan presided over the fashion house, following Yves Saint Laurent who first took over after Dior's death in 1957, aged 52. A time of rapid change, the decade saw the introduction of the first ready-to-wear collection, called Miss Dior and models wore echoes of this,

from beaded dresses and white boots, to short skirts and jackets graffitied with the original Miss Dior logo, as well as A-line gowns and a palette of camel, black, grey and white.

Like the label, the show is sophisticated, calm, but most of all, desirable. There are no outrageous designs intended for Instagram moments, no front-row celebrities sporting barely-there outfits. Models walk to the soundtrack J'taime and from the bags, to the shoes, the coats to the gowns, what isn't there to love?

Certainly, Mendelsohn's all in. "I love him more than anyone I've ever played," he later declares and as we depart, we leave him wandering the pavilion, seemingly never wanting the moment of magic to end.



Australia's most recognisable and brightest design talent joined Vogue Living editor-in-chief Rebecca Caratti on Thursday night for the VL50 Awards, presented by Mobilia, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

VIP guests including editorial director and publisher Edwina McCann, David Flack, Fiona Lynch, Paul Bangay, Patrick and Tamsin Johnson, and Bianca Spender attended the soiree, hosted by Channel 9's Sarah Abo.

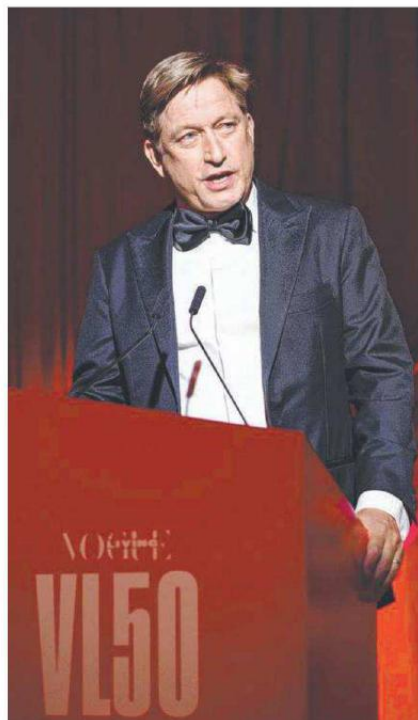
It celebrated the country's top 50 creatives across interior design, architecture, product design and art – as selected by Vogue Living.

The full VL50 list appears in the March/April issue of Vogue Living out now, with the 10 VL50 category winners showcased in the May/June issue on sale April 18. **Briana Domjen**

PARTIES VOGUE LIVING AWARDS



Vogue Living editor-in-chief Rebecca Caratti and editorial director Edwina McCann.



Paul Vangay.



Sarah Abo.



David Flack.