

THE SPRING OFF DUTY 50 | STYLE & FASHION

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Strut Down Memory Lane

Revisiting one's youthful efforts can trigger both sweet nostalgia and stomach-turning cringes. Six prominent fashion designers tell **Katharine K. Zarrella** how they feel today about their very first spring collections



Simone
Rocha

First spring show 2012

Notable for A schoolgirl sensibility; clever use of lace; Perspex brogues
Critical reaction "This was as polished a performance as we could expect from the very best of London Fashion Week." —Alexander Fury, SHOWstudio.com

What the designer says now "The collection was shown in an old townhouse, which we later found out was actually a brothel with a large Jacuzzi in the crypt below the house. I feel proud of the fabrications which are still very signature to me today—lace, tulle, tailoring, transparency. I also like how lots of the looks were very short. I still love the plastic pieces with real lace trapped inside I found in markets. I would change very little. It was right for me at the time and place."



Joseph
Altuzarra

First spring show 2010

Notable for '70s suede; Swiss dots; slouchy sex appeal
Critical reaction "Jolt or not, it was a fascinating show." —Cathy Horyn, The New York Times

What the designer says now "It's still one of my favorite collections I've done. It really set the tone for what the Altuzarra woman wears in the spring: she's feminine, undone, floaty and sexy. I don't think I would change a thing! It was the first time I had worked with leather and it was a very steep learning curve, but it did start my love affair with the material. The zipper on the finale gown on Natasha Poly [pictured above] broke a minute before she was supposed to go out on the runway—we had to very quickly take the dress off and sew her into [it]"



Thom
Browne

First spring show 2012

Notable for Lobster claws; extreme proportions; a bird-woman in a cage
Critical reaction "Totally weird, amusing, and irritating in equal measure." —WWD

What the designer says now "I call it 'The Flapper Show' because it was somewhat '20s-feeling but not literally referencing the era. You saw in the shapes how confident and secure these girls were. It's horrible for me to say, but I think [this collection] was so underrated. There are so many interesting ideas that I still go back and pull from. I have grown and I have evolved, but one thing that hasn't changed is how I want people to see [my shows]. I always knew that I wanted people to have a true experience."



Jack McCollough
and Lazaro Hernandez
of Proenza Schouler

First spring show 2004

Notable for Youthful shorts; nautical flair; splitting the critics
Critical reaction "There were some great pieces...But in the main, it was separates in search of a collection."

—Cathy Horyn, The New York Times
What the designers say now "We'd just graduated from college and started our collection and we were still experimenting. Vogue called it one of the top 10 collections [of the season]. But Cathy Horyn, who has since become a friend, tore it apart. It was like a dagger through the heart, but she was totally right and we definitely kept [her feedback] in our heads for a couple of seasons," recalled Jack McCollough, who designs Proenza Schouler with Lazaro Hernandez, adding that their design process has evolved significantly.



Victoria
Beckham

First spring show 2009

Notable for Sleek silhouettes; proving that a celebrity can tailor
Critical reaction "The woman formerly known as Posh Spice has launched a dress collection, and, believe it or not, it's one of the hottest things going in New York this week." —Nicole Phelps, Style.com

What the designer says now "I still love that first spring collection... I was creating pieces that I wanted in my own wardrobe, hoping that others would also want them in theirs. It was made up of dresses that I had worked really hard to make perfect, with amazing corsetry and careful boning. We didn't have a fit model, so I did what I needed to do and stripped down to my underwear to try on these amazing pieces."