

A Fashionista's Style Dictionary

by Megan Lau, TheSoko.com

Ever wonder what 'haute couture' actually means? We define it along with some other style slangs.



Like sports, art, or music, fashion uses vocabulary that's mostly foreign to everyone but the pros and their diehard followers. Reading Vogue can be a peek inside the closed world of catwalk kings and queens but it's often like a picture book we have to decode in order to mimic runway looks from New York, Paris, and Milan.

But gaining this easy-to-learn lingo is definitely beneficial. Try telling a record store clerk what your music tastes are without knowing 'soul', 'rock', or 'classical' – it's not exactly easy. So you can understand how fashion terminology can help you out.

Bringing a picture to the mall can help you remember what you're looking for but it's also nice to be able to describe exactly what you want without being tongue-tied. Here is a starter's glossary to chatting Chanel, gabbing Gucci, and talking about all the hottest looks for fall.

A-line

A-line dresses and skirts are those that are form fitting at the waist and flare out towards a big hem, forming a tent or "A"-like shape. It's one of the most classic shapes in women's clothing and one of the most flattering.

Bias Cut

This term is derived from the process, rather than the finished product. When something's cut on the bias cut, the fabric is cut across the grain, diagonally. What you get are clothes that drape across the body beautifully, in a slinky sort of way.

Since so much fabric (usually silk) is wasted in making gowns this way, it's especially luxurious to get a bias cut garment.

Boucle

(pronounced BOO' clay)

Chanel's famous suits made of that mysteriously bumpy fabric are actually bouclé. Using fancy yarns, the thread is pulled in various directions to get that knobby texture. Bouclé is a hot trend for fall.

Cowl Neck

The cowl neck is probably one of the most flattering necklines but the hardest to describe. It is the softly draped neckline made with an excess of material attached shoulder to shoulder.

Double-Breasted

Double-breasted jackets and coats, as opposed to single-breasted ones –which only have one row of buttons and no overlap – have a single row of buttonholes but a double row of buttons, with one of the front panels lapped over the other. Peacoats are always double-breasted.

Empire Waist

(pronounced OM' peer)

Another trend for this season, also known as the baby doll shape, the empire waist is one that begins right below the bust. It does wonders for petite figures, creating the illusion of height! It's also great for disguising bottom heavy shapes.

Haute Couture

What exactly is "couture"? The word gets thrown around a lot without much understanding of what it means or where it comes from. Well, quite literally, the word means elegant or high sewing – in other words, high fashion.

Couture can refer to the process of creating fashions – that involve custom fitting for the wearer, expensive fabrics, and ultra time-consuming techniques – or the fashions themselves. Either way, haute couture is an art and tradition that is preserved by very few fashion houses in Europe.

Knickerbockers

Long shorts, whether they are capris, culottes, or Bermuda shorts, are still all the rage. Knickerbockers – more commonly known as 'knickers' are a wide leg pant that's gathered just below the knee with a button or buckle.

It was a popular look in the late 19th century but for this year, pair them with alluring knee-high boots for a look that's very *now*.

Mule

No, we're not talking livestock here. In the world of footwear, a mule is a backless shoe (often open toed) with any height heel.

Patent

Patent leather is hot for fall. The high gloss finish makes it look as if there is a thick layer of shiny varnish on the surface. Patent finishes, which can be used on leather or nylon, were popular in the eighties and are making a return in a big way this year. Wear patent in moderation for a sexy and glamorous look.

Ready-to-Wear

In France, they call it "prêt-à-porter." As opposed to haute-couture creations, which are one of a kind, ready-to-wear clothing is mass-manufactured in standard sizes for sale in the stores for those of us who have budgets that are more modest.

Ruching

(pronounced ROO' shing)

Ruching is a sewing technique that pulls fabric together into tiny pleats to be gathered into a seam shorter than the length of the fabric. The result is fabulously sexy. It can make your bust look larger or your tummy look smaller, depending on how it's used.

Tunic

Although great Greek men used to wear tunics, it's a look that's been hijacked by fashion mavens today.

A tunic is a dress or top with a hem mid-thigh or longer that's worn belted at the waist. Modern takes on the tunic, such as the sweater dress, worn over leggings are a must-have look for the coming months.

fashionably fluent

With this sampler of stylish slang, you're ready to get out there, hit the malls, and continue your style education. If you're itching to learn more, just ask a sales associate if what something is called; the web is also a great resource for defining runway related terms. In no time, you'll be fluent in fashion.

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