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## SEX APPEAL

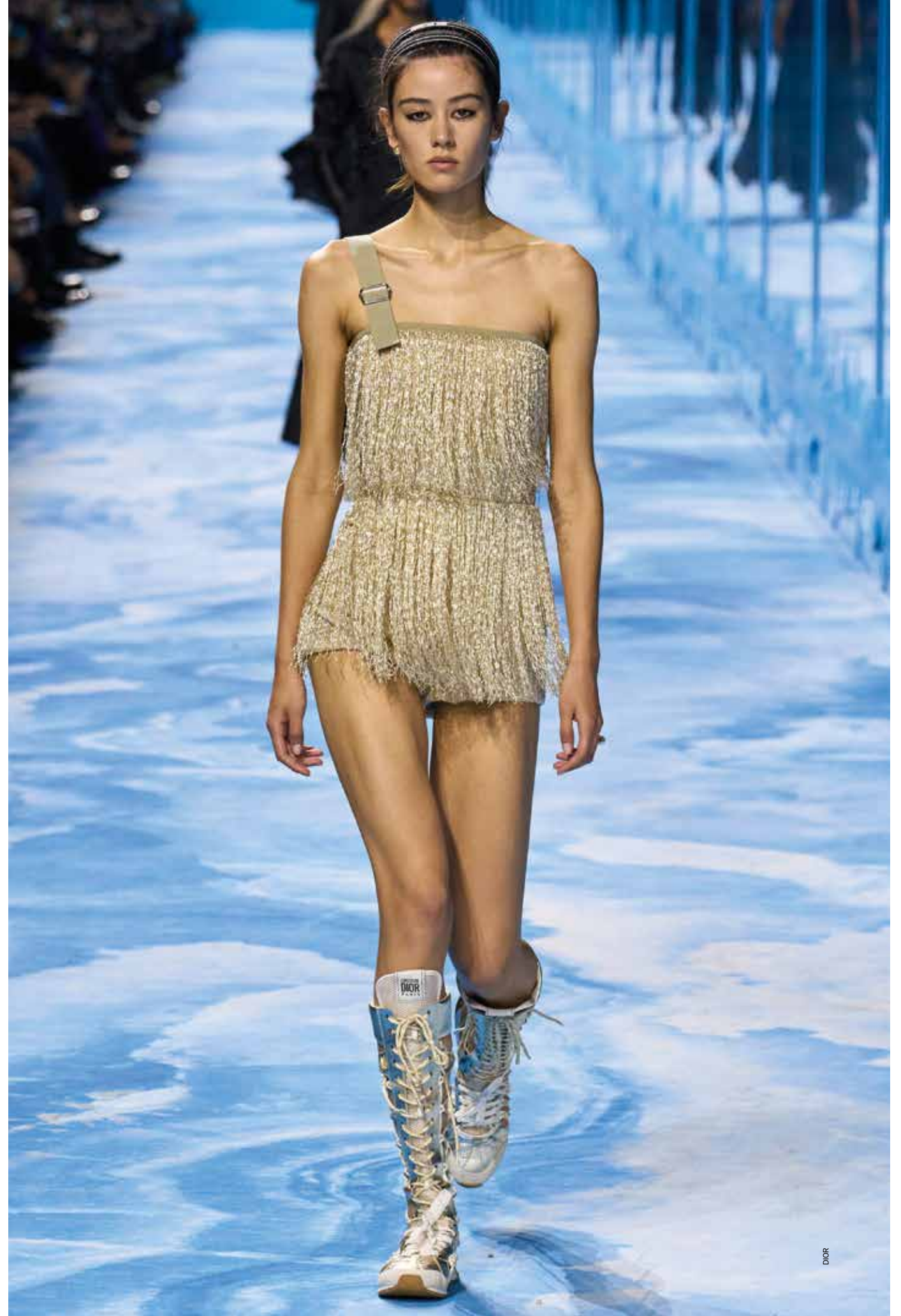
The urge to move toward more body-conscious, revealing clothing is back—but with a more interesting edge.

By RENÉE REARDIN

FOR YEARS, WE’VE BEEN REACHING INTO OUR CLOSETS and pulling out anything oversized—and long and drapery and whatever else makes the shape of our body practically imperceptible. We’ve nestled into The Row-inspired blanket coats and stepped into Khaite-esque ankle-grazing dresses in a bid to achieve sophisticated looks that say “I’m dressing not for the male gaze but for the fashion-girl gaze.” But now the tide has shifted—can you feel it? There’s a palpable itch in the air, a desire to don a different silhouette—one that reveals our legs, waist, décolleté and, heck, even our nipples yet still has nothing to do with men.

“We’re definitely moving into more form-fitting clothing again,” says Erica Wark, a Toronto-based stylist whose clients include everyone from therapists and content creators to TV hosts on *The Social* and *Good Morning America*. “My clients have been shifting more into skirts and dresses, belting oversized blazers to cinch the waist and rocking the sheer trend.” American stylist Allison Bornstein has noticed the same thing. In a November 2024 episode of Puck’s Fashion People podcast, host Lauren Sherman asked, “This has come up a lot in my reporting but also in these conversations we do on the podcast: Do you find that a lot of women are trying to dress sexier?” And Bornstein replied, “A lot.” In her Zoom styling sessions with women across the globe, “there’ve been five people maybe in the past month that ▶

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have referenced Sylvie from *Emily in Paris*,” she said. They want Bornstein to help them achieve “that slinky, sexy” style.

This desire to show off the bod hasn’t escaped stylists themselves either. “When I’ve wanted to dress up [lately], I’ve been opting for sheer black tights with short dresses or short shorts and oversized blazers with a tall boot,” says Wark. “For so many years, mostly due to COVID, we all pushed our fashion personalities to the background, but the pendulum is swinging back into femininity, and we’re celebrating our bodies again.”

Some of the biggest trends of spring/summer 2025 are about just that. Think micro-bottoms, transparent dresses and peekaboo fringes. Specifically, underwear-like pieces were presented at Balenciaga, Acne Studios and Carven and were teamed with garter belts, cardigans and blouses, respectively. There were also plenty of hot pants, which we’ve been seeing for a few years now, but this new variety was decked with ruffles at Chloé, was teamed with lace skirts at Fendi and appeared baby-bloomer-inspired at Miu Miu. Sheer dresses that exposed a nipple here or an upper thigh there were seen at Alberta Ferretti, Victoria Beckham and Dolce & Gabbana, and full-fringe skirts—great for gam-flashing—were spotted at Dior, Fendi and Proenza Schouler.

But here’s the thing: This sexy style of dressing is different from the last time bare-it-all fashion was trending, in the early aughts. Although one could argue that we’re seeing a Y2K fashion revival, with people leaning into indie-sleaze style and Paris Hilton’s *The Simple Life*-era crop tops and micro-skirts, today’s skin-showing trend boasts an awkward edge. “Miu Miu and Prada are going back to what [creative director] Miuccia would define as sexy,” says Vancouver-based fashion historian Natalie Stevenson. The latest collections featured “the weird, quirky mismatch that Prada has become known for.” Prada paired tube tops with business-casual bottoms, for example, and Miu Miu styled its aforementioned baby-bloomer-inspired shorts with tucked-in button-down shirts. “It’s a residual effect from Man Repeller,” says Stevenson, referencing fashion influencer Leandra Medine Cohen’s mid-aughts blog documenting her looks, which were traditionally unappealing to the opposite sex. “That style—the contrast of something so abnormal with something sexy—is interesting because it’s such a female-gaze approach to clothes.”

And that aligns with another reason we’re seeing this type of sexy-mixed-with-awkward dressing: the fact that we now view

gender as a spectrum. “It kind of decentres the sexualization of a woman’s body,” says Stevenson, and that can have an impact on the way one chooses to show off parts of their body. Think Emma Corrin in Saint Laurent’s nipple-peeking olive, cobalt and raspberry number, which they teamed with an unfussy pixie cut at the Berlin premiere of *Nosferatu*.

Of course, there were different interpretations of sex-focused dressing before the 21st century. In fact, every decade seems to see a rewrite of the definition of “sexy.” According to Stevenson, one of the biggest trends for women during the French Revolution era was sheer chemises that offered a glimpse of the nipple, and in the 1920s, it was the *garçon* look—boyish frames and short skirts—that was celebrated. Sexyish fashion didn’t return for a few decades, until post-war material regulations subsided, and then in the ’60s and ’70s, we saw complete fashion liberation, with short hemlines and second-skin denim, followed by the ’80s, which brought large-shouldered, fitted-skirt power suits. The ’90s brought the Spice Girls in their itty-bitty clothes paired with sky-high platforms, and the ’00s leaned toward a more raunchy bimbo style.

In the 2020s, though, people feel more comfortable displaying their bodies than ever before. “The body-positivity movement showed different kinds of bodies, and now people are used to seeing them,” says Stevenson. When we see bodies similar to our own in the media, we feel more comfortable showing off ours too.

Today, the coolest way to wear sexy pieces is by simply weaving them into your current wardrobe, according to Wark. “Take a sheer bodysuit, wear a corseted bustier overtop and pair [that combo] with a trouser,” she says. The trick is to find the pieces and proportions that make you feel comfortable while showing a bit more skin than you might be used to or emphasizing your body shape more. “You could also pop on a sheer or lace dress and put a miniskirt and sweater on top,” she says. Or wear a pair of hot pants with a long jacket and a business-casual top. Dress for yourself—not the male gaze and maybe not even the fashion-girl gaze—and concentrate on what you feel good in.

“I’m really enjoying this new era of not caring about what other people think and doing what I want to do with my wardrobe,” says Wark. “It’s such a freeing experience.” An equally freeing feeling? Going sans pants and bra. ■