



[FindArticles](#) > [Chicago Sun-Times](#) > [Sep 13, 2005](#) > [Article](#) > Print friendly

BACK DRAFT

TERI AGINS

Next spring, the fashion forward will be looking backward. The Spring 2006 collections shown at New York Fashion Week, which began Friday, include an array of backless dresses, gowns and tops from such designers as Oscar de la Renta, Donna Karan, Doo-Ri, Carmen Marc Valvo, Rachel Roy and Ellen Tracy. The look ranges from the demure top that just bares the shoulder blades and might be worn to the office, to the halter that dips very low, to the cocktail dress that has no back at all.

"Showing a woman's back is alluring without being obvious," says de la Renta, whose spring show Monday includes a leaves-and-lace white floral gown featuring a dramatic cut-out back.

Sexy fashions used to be about cleavage and short hemlines. Then, in the late 1990s, low-rise jeans shifted the erogenous zone to the belly button and the buttocks.

It was only a matter of time before fashion would migrate northward a few inches to explore the back. The back is "the last frontier -- a new erogenous zone," declares David Wolfe, creative director of Doneger Group, consultants to hundreds of American retailers.

"I think that more women are starting to get bored with cleavage," says New York designer Doo-Ri, whose collection Sunday featured back draping, cutouts and halters.

Nina Stotler, a New York-based consultant to Peclers Paris, a fashion-trend forecaster, insists that the backless look is just a new way to continue to emphasize the backside. "When you're looking at a bare back, it's like an arrow that's pointing straight to the butt. It's like saying 'How low is it going to go?' " she says.

Others trace the look to Hollywood. Wolfe cites a recent shift to low-cut backs on gowns worn on the red carpet by such actresses as Halle Berry and Kate Hudson. Last spring at the Oscars, Hilary Swank created the evening's most unforgettable fashion moment when she appeared in a skin-tight, long-sleeve, backless gown by Guy Laroche.

"The fact that Hilary was so covered up and so sexy at the same time made it that much more provocative," says Andrew Bolton, associate curator of the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

A lot of the bareback styles coming out this spring will be user-friendly and even office appropriate. At a fashion show today, apparelmaker Ellen Tracy is filling the runway with skirt and pant ensembles worn with "U-back halters," which are sleeveless tops, scooped out under the shoulder blades. The tops are cut high enough so that a woman can still wear a strapless bra, enhancing their appeal to the brand's baby boomer fans, explains George Sharp, vice president of design for Ellen Tracy.

Just like any revealing style, the bareback look means that women must worry about keeping their backs in shape and eliminating underarm bulges. "Women used to always worry about getting too muscular," says Troy Jernigan, a personal trainer at the New York Sports Clubs. As women start to wear strapless dresses, they are "coming in and asking to do the same pull-downs and dumbbells that men do so that they can have a more muscular back and arms."

Dress designer Carmen Marc Valvo, who shows Wednesday, says he has licked "the bra issue" for strapless dresses by having

an inner corset; it's sewn inside and hooks and ties at the waist. But in other cases, when the back of a dress falls lower than the waistline, Valvo suggests that women "invest in some good alterations" in order to get a flattering fit.

Wall Street Journal

Copyright The Chicago Sun-Times, Inc.

Provided by ProQuest Information and Learning Company. All rights Reserved.