

# The

# Opulent

# Apron

by Silvia Bombardini

**Winner of the prestigious Première Vision Grand Prize at the thirtieth edition of the Hyères International Festival of Fashion and Photography, overseen for the occasion by no less than Karl Lagerfeld himself, Annelie Schubert is paving the way for what might be a new generation of German designers on the rise. A Haider Ackermann trainee not so long ago, she defines a voluminous silhouette in distilled principles. Draped here, layered there, sculpted but cozy and versatile, her “aprons” collection comes tinged in a clayey, sandy palette freshened by accents of pellucid minerals. As she warms up to make the most of an exclusive chance to collaborate with the specialty ateliers of Chanel’s Paraffection subsidiary, Annelie tells us more about the apron as a perfect synthesis of protectiveness and openness, and how to take colors very seriously and be generous with fabrics.**

**Silvia Bombardini: If it’s in fashion that the spirit of our time takes pride, aprons, handy and symbolic, discreet and resilient, have throughout history withstood its whims and swings. In collective and personal memory, the cloth of the apron is likely one of the earliest we encounter: do you recall the first apron that caught your eye? How did this modest and cozy motherly garment come to be the keystone of your collection?**

Annelie Schubert: My point of departure is usually more abstract than concrete. In the beginning I was more interested in a vague atmosphere, or an attitude. I took a closer look at the concept of opacity. Opacity has attributes such as subtlety, ambiguity, and obscurity: I am interested in these as expressions of femininity, which I would like to see reflected in my collection. And opacity is always in relationship with transparency. I liked the idea of finding an analogy between opacity and protectiveness, and between transparency and openness, both qualities of an apron.

The apron has this historical reference on the one hand, which I wasn’t so interested in, but it’s also known as a functional workwear garment. Society has changed, and aprons no longer necessarily embody or symbolize the motherly. The form has in a sense been liberated to the point where one, myself in this case, could concentrate on its characteristic open silhouette and play with the form to transform it from being something functional into something more elegant and opulent. I wanted to get back to what the essence of an apron is, which is defined by a covered front and an open back, and experiment with different materials and color combinations.

**SB: You mention the apron as a workwear garment: indeed, while some may think of it as meek or acquiescent, the vestige of a demure idea of femininity no longer fits our ethics and lifestyles, what the apron also always stood for, in between its flaps, is hard work and pride in one’s craft, level-headedness and social equality. What style of apron have you primarily looked at in your research?**

AS: I researched various kinds of aprons but functional workwear aprons most of all. But in the end I was generally more interested in their

structure, the question of how one would actually wear this garment, which is tight around the body most of the time... The apron is a silhouette that allowed me to create an affinity between different pieces, for example a t-shirt-apron or a sweater-apron. Each crossover connects the attributes of the respective garments.

I was looking for a feminine expression with a subtle sensuality, as well as a casual opulence, a generosity. For example I tried to use fabrics in a generous way.

**SB: Sincerity could also almost play a structural role in the apron — when compared to, say, a suit. There’s nothing more airy and candid. It’s all the more evident in your outfits, when the apron becomes outerwear that allows us a peek at what’s worn underneath. Yet I know you built the dresses directly on the model, like sculptures: what were the fabrics you opted for, to achieve this balance of opacity and transparency?**

AS: I contrasted voluminous opaque wools with light transparent organza silk. These materials are so different that each of them would highlight the idiosyncratic characteristics of the other.

**SB: You’ve also mentioned that your process begins with tissue samples in different colors, which you then put together like abstract paintings to inspire the palette of your collection — and the apron is, of course, also an essential feature of the painter’s uniform. Is there perhaps a particular artist you admire, whose work or influence we would find on your moodboard?**

AS: The material and color research is an important exercise for me. I have a lot of respect for colors and I take them very seriously. The vague atmosphere that emanates from a textile, or a combination of colors and silhouette, is fundamental in my work. I look at artworks, especially paintings, that feature a certain color combination — for example the painter Andreas Golder, who is keen and sensitive in the way he arranges colors. What inspires me is the relationship between them, and in particular seeing the seriousness and certainty, but also the ease with which he approaches and handles colors. The dialogue with my brother, who is an artist too, also influences me.

**SB: Someone else who might have influenced your creative growth is Haider Ackermann, whom you assisted as an intern right after you bachelor’s degree. In which ways, if any, did this experience help you develop your own taste and style?**

AS: Mainly it gave me more confidence. The atelier made me feel like a respected member of the team. They gave me the opportunity to try out a lot of things and therefore to challenge myself.

**SB: At the thirtieth edition of the Festival de Hyères, three of the ten selected designers were from Germany, and the most illustrious German in the field, perhaps of all time, supervised as the event’s artistic director. It looks like there might just be a new wave of national or Berlin-based talents ready to take the fashion world by storm. If that’s the case, why do you believe it’s happening now? What was your impression of the Mercedes-Benz**

**Fashion Week there, that you were invited to take part in in July?**

AS: I’m not sure. It might be thanks to the quality of our schools. I’m very grateful for the invitation to the Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week, which allowed me to present my work to a German audience. I had the impression that fashion is increasingly being considered as something valuable and precious, and worth of being promoted.

**SB: Caroline de Maigret, who was in the jury, said she could see herself wearing your clothes. As huge a compliment as that is, I wonder if she’s the best fit for the kind of woman you’ve in mind when you design. Do you have a muse of your own, real or fictional? How would you describe her character?**

AS: Of course this is the best compliment that you can get, especially from such a strong woman with incredible looks and charisma. I don’t have a particular muse in mind. What interests me in women is their apparent contradiction. I like the idea of a woman who is aware of her own strength, a strength which also comes from the knowledge of her vulnerability. I would like women to feel not only comfortable but empowered in my clothes.

**SB: Finally, let’s look ahead a bit — with the Grand Prize under your belt, what’s the next step? What does your schedule look like over the coming months, and what are your hopes, projects, and dreams for those that will follow?**

AS: I am currently working with Petit Bateau on a capsule collection — which is actually a lot of fun. In the coming week I will start the collaboration with Chanel’s Métiers d’Art, and I’m very excited about it, because this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. So I will be busy with that. For the future, I just hope that I will have the chance to work in an environment where I can grow and be challenged.

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