

FASHION MILAN

Escaping for an afternoon

BY LAURA RYSMAN

In the days before the Jil Sander spring ready-to-wear show, the brand's creative director, Rodolfo Pagliarunga, found himself with some rare free time. Samples for the collection had been approved, final styles were still in transit — so he decided to escape fashion and spend an afternoon of shopping in Milan's design stores.

"It's been a lifetime since I've gone around Milan to check out beautiful things," said the designer, 48, flipping through wallpaper cards at Wall & Decò, a showroom hidden in a Brera courtyard, and pausing in wonder over a brocade-like floral and several trompe-l'oeil styles that looked like concrete, parchment and worn cloth.

His own 1920s-era apartment is a hybrid of vintage and contemporary: original wood floors and new black marble tiles, one-offs by Martino Gamper paired with 1950s Albini armchairs and a towering bookcase, all shared with his boyfriend (also in the fashion industry, but "thankfully not another designer") and a mother-daughter pair of Jack Russells. Mr. Pagliarunga moved to Milan from the small, medieval town of Tolentino to study fashion at the Marangoni Institute 30 years ago. After a first job at Romeo Gigli, he spent 14 years at Prada — 10 as the head of women's wear — before taking over Yvonne for three years and, in 2014, landing at Jil Sander.

Browsing at Raw, a darkened, an-

tique-style curio shop, he admired a set of taxidermed butterflies and decoupage plates and traced the curve of a 1951 Schottlander lamp, which illuminated a display of rusted watering cans. Outside, Mr. Pagliarunga marveled at the potency of vintage.

"The past makes us feel safer, cozier," he said. "Truly new things only come from science and technology. Fashion has to begin with the past to invent something new."

Design pieces "perfect enough to overcome time" continue to feel modern, even after decades, he said. "The work of Gio Ponti has perfect proportions, materials and equilibrium. Looking at the past means trying to understand the things that are still perfect and modern today."

At Nùlfar Depot, monumental Gio Ponti lamps hung overhead in the sprawling design warehouse owned by the dealer Nina Yashar. Mr. Pagliarunga's friend, whom he calls a "fantastic eccentric." She procured several pieces for the designer's apartment, including Gamper pieces crafted — "like Arte Povera," he said — from the Ferrarica doors of a 1950s Ponti-designed hotel. "They reference the past, but they are completely modern," Mr. Pagliarunga said.

The Jil Sander brand's past has been notoriously rocky. Prada bought the brand in 1999 — after which the designer relinquished her directorship three times, most recently in October 2013. It



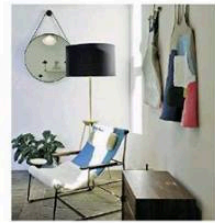
In Milan, Rodolfo Pagliarunga, creative director at Jil Sander, browsing at the design shop Raw and, right, a window display at the handmade furniture gallery BDDW.

has belonged to Onward Holdings, a Japanese fashion conglomerate, since 2008. Mr. Pagliarunga was appointed creative director in April 2014 and presented his first women's collection last September, starting with a core of Jil Sander codes.

"It's been a very intense year at Jil

Sander," he said, collapsing into a showroom's sheepskin version of the Albini chair he has at home. "In a new office, you have to basically learn a new language, and with a company that's gone through so many changes, we need to reconstruct and update the brand."

The public expects a continuation of



its minimalist themes, but Mr. Pagliarunga sees more possibility.

"I feel more liberated this season," he said. "Minimalism can be much more inventive. It's not about the clothes anymore, it's the way they're put together, the simplicity of not being overdesigned." The influence of the brand's powerfully spare style can today be found at fast fashion retailers like Cos and Uniqlo, where Ms. Sander now has been collaborating.

"It's not important to defend the DNA of the brand, but to keep up with how the world is changing," Mr. Pagliarunga said. "People choose clothes by instinct today. It's not about 'utilitarian' anymore."

Of the coming collection, scheduled to be shown Saturday, he said. "This season will be much more feminine, with more prints, more color and new materials." Arriving at the gallery of Rossana Orlandi, the designer, surrounded by a riot of design chairs, inhaled deeply in the grapevine-covered garden.

"This is a beautiful place where I never feel like buying anything. It's a shame they don't put a bar here," he said.

At BDDW, a gallery of high-end handmade furniture, he fell in love with wood-slab tables spangled with inlaid patches and butterfly joints, crouching on the floor to examine an inlaid brass base. Prices were requested (table for six — \$28,000, table for 12 — \$80,000) before a last stop at Apparatus, a sister site in a converted carpenter's workshop, where a horsehair lamp provided one last temptation.

"Now that we've seen so much furniture, I'm dying to redo my entire apartment," he said, wistfully considering a wooden table.

Leaving the shop empty-handed, except for the afternoon's last cigarette, he said. "Once you decide to change something, you have to change everything."

Wall & Decò, Via Pontaccio 19, Milan, www.wallanddeco.com
Raw, Via Palermo 1, Milan, www.rawmilano.it
Nùlfar Depot, Viale Vincenzo Lancetti 34, Milan, www.nulfar.com
BDDW, Via Santa Marta 19/A, Milan, www.bddw.com
Apparatus, Via Santa Marta 14, Milan, www.apparatusstudio.com



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Young talents celebrate a showcase in the rain

BY ELIZABETH PATON

Milanese fashion is at something of a crossroads. Long a dominant force in the luxury world, led by old guard designers including Giorgio Armani and Miuccia Prada, the city's fashion elite has historically shown itself less inclined than those in rival capitals to empower fledgling talent. Critics suggest that in recent seasons, this lack has started to show at Milan Fashion Week. So, unsurprisingly, several initiatives are starting to emerge, engineered to offer the next designer generation — from Italy and around the world — the cash and support necessary to vault them to blockbuster level. Perhaps the most successful is the Vogue Talents partnership between Kering and Vogue Italia, now in its third year, which offers internships at leading Kering brands. On Wednesday night, François-Henri Pinault, the Kering chief executive, and Franca Sozzani, editor of Italian Vogue, threw a sprawling cocktail bash at the Palazzo Morando to celebrate the program and showcase its young designers' wares.

Giuseppe Di Morabito is an Italian whose clothes are, in his words, "rooted in elegance, embroideries, prints and refined shapes to revive iconic Italian art." Guests appeared enchanted by his collection of sheer gauzy blouses and tea dresses, painstakingly stitched in swirling Renaissance florals with a powdered pastel palette.

"It's a fantastic networking opportunity, and the others around me are so good and yet their work is very different from my own," he said, beaming and gesturing toward his fellow young designers.

"It's been a tough few years in Italy," Mr. Di Morabito added, "so this display of support for young designers is very encouraging."

Farther along the line of installations that snaked around the rain-soaked main courtyard, MaXhosa by Laduma displayed bold Xhosa-inspired prints on tailored Western knitwear silhouettes.

"It's a dream come true to be here," said Laduma Ngxokolo, the South African who won the 2015 Vogue Italia Scout for Africa prize. "To have caught the attentions of those defining the industry today gives me hope that my brand might be one that defines tomorrow."