



SILVER WEAR

Age should not wither your interest in fashion – Sarah Shannon profiles a young designer who has put older women back on the catwalk

FANNY KARST IS SLENDER, French and effortlessly chic from the tips of her vermilion-painted nails to the ballet pumps on her feet. It's hardly a surprise to discover she works in fashion but it's the niche she has carved for herself that makes Fanny unique. In an industry obsessed with youth, this 25-year-old decided to make clothes for older ladies. She formulated her plan when she was a teenager and obsessed with impressing her grandmother who she noticed becoming more elegant with each passing year.

She was drawn to older role models and cites French designer Andrée Putman and our Dowager Duchess of Devonshire as favourites (although the latter, disappointingly, is not interested in fashion). Today, the goal of her 'The Old Ladies'

Rebellion label is to prove you can be elegant and a little bit rock'n'roll at any age. 'Older ladies can feel a little bit forgotten by the fashion world. If you are interested in clothes in your 20s, you are still interested in your 80s. I'm very lucky that most of my clients are in their 70s and 80s. Ideally they would all be 100, but I won't turn anyone away if they're a bit younger,' Fanny says.

Her first collection has already proved a hit and she launched her second at the last London Fashion Week. So what does Fanny have in mind for this season's older women? 'I hate the idea of older women having to wear the frumpy shirt with the bad material and the ugly collar,' she says. So she has designed beautiful silk shift dresses that finish on the knee – after all,

an older woman's legs are often her most youthful asset.

'I always put in shoulder pads for a little attitude and it makes the dress fall better. My dresses have slits at the wrist so the sleeve falls a little. It brings sexiness to the small details and you can see what beautiful wrists they have,' she says, gesturing at photographs of her models. Her silver-haired models aren't your average bunch of older women. One used to model for Balenciaga, another for Calvin Klein.

Fanny studied fashion print at Central Saint Martins and her silks are patterned with bold digital prints of wisps of smoke, eclipses and purple flames. 'It's all about that time the sun goes down and the moon comes up and there's an air of mystery.'

This season her prints spill over tabard-

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Fanny's 2008 collection. Opposite, far left: The Uninvited Guest 2010 collection. Below: Fanny (third from left) with the ladies modelling her 2010 collection

like panels that hang over the front and back of her dresses. 'When they walk, the panel follows them, it flows,' says Fanny. She uses a sophisticated palette of dove grey, bright navy and black, with occasional flashes of purple. The dresses zip at the back so the front can become a *trompe l'oeil*, disguising itself as a jacket and skirt.

After Saint Martins, Fanny spent a year learning to cut at Savile Row tailors Chittleborough & Morgan, but she never considered going back to France to work. 'Everything English seems better to me. I think London is the happening place in fashion: there's a freedom here that I like.'

Fanny's dresses cost around £500, but she says on a budget, older ladies look 'wonderful in good sportswear, like colourful Lacoste polo shirts and nice trainers. If I ever do a ready-to-wear collection, I'd develop some elegant sportswear.' ♦

THE OLD LADIES' REBELLION www.oldladiesrebellion.com

