

Cecilie Bahnsen: Relief Fabrics, Sculptural Fashion for Classic Opulence

Cecilie Rosted Bahnsen is a Danish fashion designer behind the luxury clothing label - Cecilie Bahnsen. From her Copenhagen studio she focuses on haute couture fabrics and artisanal craftsmanship formed into voluminous silhouettes that have become her signature. The result is desirable expressions for contemporary womenswear.

She studied in BA Fashion Design and Textile at the Danish Design School, Copenhagen (2007) where she met Danish costume designer Anja Vang Krag, assisting her on several freelance projects for Christian Dior and the Royal Danish Theatre. After her BA Cecilie Bahnsen interned at John Galliano, creative director at Dior in Paris where she later returned as first line assistant and print designer, an experience she gained enormously from. She undertook an MA in Fashion Womenswear at London's Royal College of Art (2010), remaining in London to work as a design assistant for Erdem. Here, she aligned to Canadian/Turkish fashion designer Erdem Moralioglu's love of textiles and learned about the entire design process that proved invaluable towards creating her own label. In 2015 Cecilie Bahnsen launched her debut collection for Spring/Summer 2016 that was exclusively stocked by the conceptual and avant-garde fashion emporium - Dover Street Market; a significant verification to advance her career.

Considered a rising Scandinavian designer Cecilie Bahnsen has won many accolades for her stylish yet effortless looks that combine structure with softness. In 2016 she won the Magasin du Nord Fashion Prize, Denmark's largest award for emerging fashion designers. This enabled her first catwalk show for the Autumn/Winter 2017 collection during Copenhagen Fashion Week staged at The Royal Danish Opera House. In 2017 she was nominated for the prestigious LVMH Prize for Young Fashion Designers and became one of eight finalists, the first Danish designer to do so. A good year for her, she was also presented with the Royal Crown Prince and Princess Stardust Award 2017 that celebrates young Danish talent.

All Cecilie Bahnsen's ready-to-wear pieces are handmade with samples undertaken in Denmark and production in Lithuania. Her designs are technically acute, demonstrating a deep understanding of both textile and garment configurations. Sculptural, architectural, cutting and inventive tailoring work well with material choices, while manipulations of cloth - tucks, gathers and ruffles further add to a controlled fullness. Resulting romantic, even pretty clothing exudes sophistication and a strong, feminine touch.

Each collection builds on her signature aesthetic where use of couture fabrics and classically derived forms are refined and perfected each season to evolve the brand's DNA. Coherent and consistent, such timelessness emphasises quality (over quantity) to fit with a sustainable approach. Cecilie Bahnsen's alluring sense of luxury with an eye on the ethical follows the Scandinavian tradition of a pared-down aesthetic that is easy-going and relaxed. Clothes are wearable and comfortable, possessing an attractive lightness and fluidity that exudes

modernity. Her label attracts a loyal customer throughout Denmark and rapidly growing interest from the Asian market, particularly Japan.

Cecilie Bahnsen is inspired by culture and nature as shown by her references to the Edwardian era in particular with its prevalence for exaggerated, ornate forms and exquisite feminine detailing that have become part of the brand's DNA. Her Spring/Summer collections conjure up sauntering on perfectly manicured lawns in fragile-looking, long white dresses. Embellished with pin tucks and lace they convey a poetic narrative. For an overall silhouette, the long white dress (LWD) appears to have taken over the popularity of the little black dress (LBD) - creating a different sensibility. Uniforms also influence but their typical strictness is often counteracted by partly destroying their order to result in looks that are attractively slightly amiss. Nature's myriad forms of growth and complexity are also a source of inspiration as can be seen by her dome-like skirted forms that call to mind plant seed heads while imagery of blossoming florals and intertwining foliage is captured in woven brocades or outlined in quilting. Her themes frequently feature in her photo shoots as decorative backdrops – fine artists studios, natural environments with lakes and gardens as well as coastal areas.

Cecilie Bahnsen develops new materials for each collection alongside Swiss, French and Italian textile manufacturers. The resulting couture fabrics have strong visual and tactile effects. Fil coupé wovens that result in raised patterning from a ground substrate are a favourite of Cecilie Bahnsen and she frequently features them in her collections as well as tulle in many incarnations – flocked polka dot or opulently embroidered. Matelassé textiles with their softly quilted appearance also feature heavily. Her range of fabrics can demonstrate sensuality with rich, sumptuous velvets and and fragility with tulle – combinations she enjoys juxtaposing, while crisp cotton poplins can imply strength. Cotton organdie and macramé lace give transparent/translucent/opaque qualities and ethereal silk organzas with hand embroidered coloured tassels have a playful character.

Her collections to date all feature traditional weaving and embellishment textile techniques such as delicate hand embroidery and fabric manipulations. Such artisanal skills frequently impart extra fullness, for example ruffled edging sometimes even 'double ruffles'; tucking of varying thicknesses - from pin to wider-than-ruler; cascading sections of gathers that blossom out towards hemlines and quilting describes square/diagonal gridded formations and stylised botanical forms.

A monochrome palette of black and white is typically favoured by many Danish fashion designers and Cecilie Bahnsen follows in this tradition – even showing white-on-white for winter as well as for summer. However, she uses this accepted neutral palette to impart lightness, highlight textures and act as a foil to vivid or subtle colours such as mustard yellow brights and blush rose pink tones.

One of Cecilie Bahnsen's instantly recognisable signatures is her classical, sculptural, even architectural silhouettes where the dome-like, bell-shaped,

cupola-formed delineate a dramatic effect. Volumetric, burgeoning wrap-fronted shapes command an area and envelop to protect the wearer. Billowing skirted fullness creates a balletic feel where dynamic forms rise to swell and dip to subside, capturing energy in their mass. Deep open-backed designs contrast against a covered-up modesty and babydoll shapes overtly describe both innocence and knowingness. Seemingly strapless designs have the wispiest of support - barely-there spaghetti straps for garments that appear to defy gravity in their suspension of volumes of fabric. Layers move around the body and give a casualness - sheer garments worn over plain white T-shirts for everyday wear. Her prevalence for loose, oversized cutting achieves a balance of volume and fit to flatter in its considered proportions. The underlying body has room to breathe and comfort is ensured. A particular trademark is the balloon sleeve where dramatic puffed-out forms create strong statements. Furthermore, peplums add in specific places with sections delineating the hips for an almost historic 'bustle-like' effect. Another frequently occurring feature is Cecilie Bahnsen's use of ties and bows. Ultra-fine ribbons trail around the wearer while large but soft, loosely tied bows create a feminine nonchalance.

Cecilie Bahnsen enjoys putting silhouettes together, particularly the interplay of the masculine with the feminine to create practical, yet elegant clothing. Clean-line, geometric cutting works with curvaceous circular cutting - austere square-cut necklines next to curvaceous sleeves and sharp trapeze shapes next to ruffles and gathers. Shorts with their truncated proportions have a tomboyish look, all-in-one boiler suits credit workwear and pajama styles are versatile enough to be worn to bed as well as to a party or work. She connects menswear/boyish elements to the ultra-feminine in a confident and unique way.

Interested in where creativity and commerciality can intersect, she wishes for her clothing to be eminently wearable. Often her looks are separates (many appearing at first to be one-piece garments) - constructed ensembles that can work together from the specific collection or be worn with other items from the wearer's wardrobe. Her clothes are teamed with flat footwear - sturdy black sandals for summer or black chelsea boots for winter that lend a contemporary feel - practical and comfortable.

Cecilie Bahnsen has slowly extended her brand into accessories - drawstring pouches with velvet ribbon ties are worn as 'bumbags' or 'backpacks'. Being made from beautiful fabrics her accessories become part of the garment and have a sense of unity. They also possess practical appeal that accommodates today's working woman.

Cecilie Bahnsen shows her catwalk collections at Copenhagen Fashion Week (CFW). Spring/Summer 2019 contains much white-on-white clothing where textured fabrics take centre stage and a mix of sheers and opaques offers visual and tactile interest. Sculptural silhouettes - asymmetric, loose, wrap-around designs provide effortless styles. Cecilie Bahnsen's signature and mainstay exaggerated sleeve forms puff up and out to hold and present distinct shaping while scalloped edges and hems give beautiful finishes. This collection has innovation at its core and juxtaposes the expected with surprises; inspired by

Japanese photographer Osamu Yokonami, known for his collective portraiture. He depicts girls wearing the same clothing, often school uniforms where each individual retains their personality despite being seen as a group.

The Cecilie Bahnsen label can be found in many shops in Copenhagen including the department store Magasin du Nord throughout Denmark. In London her designs are at Selfridges, while Dover Street Market stocks her label globally.

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