

# RETHINKING SEASONS

Jana Melkumova-Reynolds/Shamin Vogel

ALONG WITH THE 'SEE NOW, BUY NOW' SCHEME, BRANDS AND RETAILERS ARE EXPLORING OTHER INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO SEASONALITY.

Celebrated couturier Azzedine **Alaïa** has always stunned the industry with his disregard for seasons: he shows his collections when he is ready, not when the fashion calendar requires it. As conversations about the relentless pace of fashion, with ever-increasing collections and retail drops per year, get more and more critical, a growing number of independent brands are rethinking the concept of seasonality.

"We design around a lifestyle concept or a material/technique, rather than a collection or product range for a season... You can compare this method to furniture design," explains Laura Silinska, designer of **senscommon**, a Dutch outerwear brand that only expands its range by adding a new product, or small line of products, once a year. Their first item was an all-commute overcoat – ultralight, breathable, water resistant and perfectly adapted to the daily commute; the next item, a coat for the frequent traveler, is in the making.

Producing fewer new products enables enhanced quality checks. "Every year I only add 2-3 new products because I spend ages testing new leather and canvas; the longest it took me to approve a product was 22 months of heavy use!" says Kurt Chen, the founder of **S.F.K.**, a Taiwanese heritage accessories label.



senscommon

Retailers are taking notice and capitalizing on the trend. **Edited**, a retail analytics company, recently published an article surveying assortments of some of the key retailers in 2017, and comparing it to their offering in 2016. It suggests that big players across all market segments – from **Nordstrom** to **Urban Outfitters** – are 'reducing newness', both in terms of products and brand mix. They are shrinking their brand selections, preferring to buy 'deeper' into the labels that best represent their customers, rather than 'wider' across a range of designers, and cutting down on new styles across clothing categories (though, interestingly, widening their footwear buy). This enables them to increase full-price sell-outs and cut back on discounting.

Investing less in new products means more budget is left over for timeless carry-over styles that have a proven track record of great sell-throughs every season. It is, of course, a fine balancing act: no one wants a selection that does not move forward at all, yet newness for the sake of newness is no longer sustainable either and only results in earlier discounts. The solution, as always, is somewhere in the middle; the only way to find it is to experiment.