

# The New York Times

Front Row

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Published: December 3, 2002

## Slipping Into the 50's

Baz Luhrmann's staging of "La Bohème," which opens Sunday on Broadway, abandons the garrets and dusky passageways of 1830's Paris for the bohemian Latin Quarter of the 1950's. The 50's conjure a world far off but still familiar, explained Catherine Martin, the production's designer. "Some of us are still very connected with all that," she said.

Many Americans, it seems, have never gotten over "all that." Witness the flurry of films and fashions that revisit the Eisenhower era. They include "Far From Heaven," Todd Haynes's homage to the director Douglas Sirk, and "The Hours," set partly in midcentury California. In fashion, Michael Kors is offering waist-cinching dresses with billowing skirts for spring. Marc Jacobs has a dainty checkered dress that Kim Novak might have worn in "Picnic."

For spring, Barneys New York will showcase flirtatious summer dresses reminiscent of Bardot in Cannes. "We've seen it all in regard to sexiness and showing off flesh," said Julie Gilhart, fashion director of Barneys. "We thought it was time for something more discreet."

A few designers sense anxiety bottled up inside the midcentury hourglass look. "Beneath it all, you knew a lot of turbulence was going on," said Cynthia Rowley, who recently saw "Far From Heaven," the story of a suburban woman whose husband has an affair with a man. Ms. Rowley is incorporating the movie's saturated colors and full skirts into her clothes for fall 2003.

Lauren Bergman, a jeweler and artist, explores a 1950's style in paintings to be shown at the OK Harris gallery in Manhattan starting Saturday. Ms. Bergman paints women in frilly aprons, tending children in appliance-crammed kitchens. "There was always the notion in the 50's that the next refrigerator, the latest bullet bra, the newest toaster was really all you would need to make life manageable," she said. "We may choose to view those days with irony, but we still are chasing the same dream."

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