July 21, 2023. That is when the already hyped Barbie movie starring Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling, directed by Greta Gerwig, comes out. Yet, social media has already declared the ‘Barbiecore’ a thing. With this much buzz a year before the movie comes out, it begs the question, ‘will consumers still desire the hot pink associated with the movement come the 2023 release date? And what exactly does the fascination with this color mean right now?’

Fashion first
To be fair, fashion has jump-started this trend most recently with Valentino’s mainly pink (with a dose of black) collection shown for Fall 2022. Creative director, Pierpaolo Piccioli, used a custom intense shade dubbed ‘Pink PP’, which will become a Pantone color.
The monochromatic approach lets the audience focus on the details used in the clothes' construction. The show got a reboot at the brand's recent haute couture in Rome this July with a star-studded front row featuring Anne Hathaway, Ariana Debose, Ashley Park, and Hwasa, the Korean singer slash celebrity and Florence Pugh, whose nearly sheer style went viral, and others sporting looks from the fall collection for the show on the Spanish Steps.

Jodi Kahn, VP of luxury fashion at Neiman Marcus, spoke to FashionNetwork.com over email, reiterating the power of pink on their clients.

"It's a best-selling color with our customers inspiring mood-boosting, positive feelings with the right amount of femininity, luxury, and sophistication that make it universally flattering, she said.

The Barbie X Balmain activation in January, according to Neiman Marcus president and chief merchandising officer, Lana Todorovich, "was a much-needed dose of fun customers were craving."

But, also a hit at retail with several styles, especially accessories selling out.

Kahn says more of the typically warm weather geared rosy color is on the way. "While dresses historically have been incredibly popular in shades of pink, brands such as Valentino, Dolce & Gabbana, and Gabriela Hearst have all introduced tailoring in variations of pink for their Fall collections, continued Kahn noting styles from Versace, Alex Perry, and Lapointe are also catering to the mood.

“There is a phenomenon happening right now with 90s and early 2000s fashion that is impossible to ignore. The nostalgia factor of Barbie mirrors the demands of our customers,” added Kahn.

Mindy Prugnaud of Mint Paris, a European buying service, agrees the chipper color is here for the foreseeable future.
"I think it will continue as we all need happy colors in our life right now. Pink is here to stay for at least another year, based on the runway shows we have been following; It's almost the new black. It's seasonless; it's fun. From Valentino to Balmain and The Frankie Shop, there's a little bit of pink in all categories and price points," she said.

A Barbie For All
For Olivier Rousteing of Balmain, exploring the different style codes of Barbie in a modern way was reason enough. But, Rousteing also had some personal feelings about the stylish doll that he shared with this reporter in an article for Forbes.

"Growing up, you are pushed into stereotypes by adults, and it's important to break those when you grow up. A Ken can dress as Barbie and Barbie as a Ken," he said, affirming that pink and bodycon can also be for men and that toys should also be free of gender assignments.

Mattel president and COO Richard Dickson also noted in the Balmain interview that the toy company aligns with the designer's inclusivity attitudes.

"We offer the greatest amount of choice in body shape and skin tone. In our 'Fashionistas' line, the top five most popular dolls in 2021 include a Black doll with an afro and a doll that uses a wheelchair."

Rousteing and Dickson see a deeper meaning to Barbie's typically bleach blonde locks and bubblegum-colored wardrobe.

Inclusivity is a focus of Mattel's latest fashion project. The toy company has partnered with human fashion brands over the years. It is getting in on the current Barbiecore action, having just announced a collaboration with vegan, cruelty-free, and size-inclusive Canadian brand Hilary MacMillan on a range of pink styles for women and kids launching August 11th.
“Barbiecore is more than a trend; it's a movement, stemming from what Barbie signifies. We've intentionally shaped the brand with a clear purpose and passion for empowerment, celebrating self-expression, inspiration, and joy. Today, Barbie simultaneously reflects and leads culture, so the relevance of Barbiecore, at a time when our collective craving for levity runs deep, makes perfect sense,” Dickson said over email in response to the buzz.

By design and by choice
For others using the color, it's purely a design choice. Paul Andrew, whose eponymous shoe line was on pause for five years while he was creative director of Ferragamo, relaunched his brand this past March.

He created styles in the hue of both satin and metallic patent leather.

"Fuchsia pink is far and away the most successful color in the new collection," Andrew told FashionNetwork.com, adding, "I find something so appealing about the vibrancy of fuchsia at this moment. The way it pairs with clothing in black, navy, white and dark brown is especially easy yet eye-catching."

While graphically the color pops, what else does it say about the wearer? Keith Recker, trend, color, and culture forecaster for Thechromosapien.com and author of the upcoming book Deep Color: The Shades that Shape Our Souls (Schiffer Books, 2022), reflects on the power of pink despite certain connotations and outright stereotypes it's associated with. He cautions not to judge the color as silly and inconsequential.

Case in point, the Russian punk band Pussy Riot was one way in which the color epitomizes strength.

"The watchword here is reappropriation with the band wearing hot pink balaclava masks. Even their name is a double reappropriation taking back the pink feminizing space with a powerful voice. The color reclaimed womanhood..."
double reappropriation taking back the pink feminine space with a powerful voice. The color reclaims womanhood as not something to be acted upon, but as something aggressively acting," he attests, referencing the history of the pink triangle in its relationship to the early AIDS movement fight. "It said, 'Don't define me. I'll define myself; don't take my power away, or I'll reclaim it and then some.'

His book also references the Gulabi Gang, a woman's rights grassroots organization in India marked by women wearing hot pink saris. Their aim is to seek justice for abused women by seeking out their male abusers and reprimanding them according to the severity of the harassment. Code Pink was an American female-founded protest group against the war in Iraq. More recently, pink 'pussy hats' were a sign of protest against Donald Trump's presidency at the 2017 Women's March on Washington, D.C.

Recker agrees it's too soon to assume that Gerwig's *Barbie* movie will be a silly romp through the doll's fantasy land, especially given the director's reputation thus far. The plot is said to center around Robbie's Barbie being ousted from 'Barbieland' for not being perfect enough, only to find herself in the real world where she encounters actual discrimination. The question remains if Barbie can continue living in a hot pink world and be perceived as empowered and not a ditzy, throwback roller girl.

"Look at Jane Fonda in the eighties and the mockery she faced wearing those aerobics leotards and legwarmers. She was working her way out of *Barbarella* and Hollywood objectification and said, 'This is what I want to do.' Now,
we wonder how bad was that? We look at the outfit with some derision, but it doesn't acknowledge the autonomy, power, and potential of that personal transformation," he said.

Recker sees the potential life span of bright pinks and their neon neighbors in today's world.

"We have plenty of room for loud, insistent, vehement, and hyper-noticeable fashion as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube make it harder for individuals and small businesses to get noticed. There is a hunger for this attention," he continued.

Besides, he says pink isn't the only arrow in the quiver. He references today's head-to-toe looks in hot neon green, neon blue, and coral orange while citing the power of Charlemagne's choice to wear red from top-to-bottom when he was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 800 CE.

"In a time when people struggle to be noticed, to feel vibrant and powerful as an individual, there may be utility in these colors that isn't dependent on Barbie; the need to feel mattered in this particular moment is bigger than Barbie," said Recker.

By Roxanne Robinson

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