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WWD THURSDAY

Sportswear

Gucci Boho

Frida Giannini's fall Gucci collection was intended to be a bohemian-rock 'n' roll hybrid. And there definitely was loads going on — as these tight, be-ringed pants, tucked into boots and shown with a dramatic fluffy jacket and shiny necklace, illustrate. Over-the-top or not, one thing isn't in doubt: Giannini's looks are big winners at retail. For more on the shows, see pages 4 to 7.

A Vote of Confidence: Claiborne Board Backs CEO McComb's Strategy

By Whitney Beckett

The Liz Claiborne Inc. board is standing by its man.

Despite disappointing earnings and a lagging stock price, Liz Claiborne's board members remain behind chief executive officer William L. McComb and his strategy. Board members firmly dismissed growing speculation that they are questioning McComb's performance, and instead attributed the anticipated missed earnings not to problems with the company's strategy, execution or leadership, but rather to inherited problems, changes in the wholesale marketplace and macroeconomic issues.

See *Liz*, Page 22

L I F E S T Y L E
monitor

A weekly update on consumer attitudes and behavior based on ongoing research from Cotton Incorporated

PREMIUM RATES
Defining Premium Denim

What elevates a jean to premium status?
 The most obvious answer is price, but as both experts and everyday women attest, a true blue definition takes more into consideration.

"My most basic definition of premium denim is a pair of jeans that start at \$100," says Claire Dupuis, a Senior Product Trend Forecaster at Cotton Incorporated and a denim specialist. "There are prices that go well above that, but the industry standard is set at \$100 as a starting point. However, there are really so many considerations in the premium equation beyond price."

Suzu Radcliffe, founder and Creative Director of Radcliffe, a two-year-old premium denim label agrees, "I would say that the textbook answer is price but that's really just the beginning."

Real women appear to feel similarly. According to the *Cotton Incorporated Lifestyle Monitor*, most women say their personal definition of premium denim is based more on perception than price. One in three female respondents cited the fit, cut and length of the jean. One in four cited the designer label, one in five cited the quality and durability and one in six cited the style. A similar one in six cited price and Jamila Galloway, a buyer for DJPremium.com, an online shopping destination, ascertains that it's not about what you pay for your jeans but how much your jeans pay off for you.

"When buying for our site, I don't typically consider the price point, but whether or not the jean is worth the price," she explains. "If a pair of jeans retails for \$500 dollars, it has to be more than just about the name; this is especially important with online retailing."

Other criteria that women considered in labeling a jean premium included the fabric or fiber, the feel or texture, the color or wash, comfort, trendiness and stitching, indicating that the premium designation is both personal and individual choice.

Chad Jackson, a spokesperson for Evisu, a leading denim label, adds that premium denim must boast a speciality that the wearer can see, feel and appreciate, and for every woman, that's something different. "At Evisu, we go to great lengths to ensure our jeans are some of the finest ever made."

That definition of finest is what the typical woman expects when shelling out additional dollars for the best that the denim world has to offer. Kerry, a twenty-something law student in North Carolina, reveals that she is looking for what she calls the "whole deal."

"While I need to be careful about what I spend, I can justify the price if it delivers unbelievable fit, good wearability and something I can wear anywhere."

Kerry's expectations regarding fit resonate with each of the experts. "Fit was revolutionized by

premium denim," tells Tadd Zarubica, Designer and Chief Executive Officer of Denim of Virtue, a premium label. "It's all about that quality of fit that we deliver."

"The true beginning of premium started with the quest for perfection," agrees Dupuis, the trend forecaster. "Brands at lower price points have taken notice and are working on that, too."

The availability of flattering jeans at every price point is excellent news considering that three out of four female respondents told the *Monitor* that fit is the most important factor in their next denim purchase. Interestingly, the chief concern about fit is length, as claimed by 36% of *Monitor* female respondents; other fit issues identified as important relative to ideal fit were waist (29%), hips (14%), thighs specifically (13%) and legs in general (5%).

"As a denim fanatic, I used to find myself buying every designer jean just to have one from each brand and I would later find that they did nothing for my figure. I have learned to go with what works and makes me feel the most confident," Galloway from

DJPremium shares.

Trying out new brands and trusting what one sees in the mirror goes a long way in helping women build a denim wardrobe that they love and count on; that's important considering that women wear their jeans four days a week on average. "Women are wearing their denim everywhere and for everything," Zarubica from Denim of Virtue says. "And considering that denim performs so well over time, it makes a smart option."

Premium denim can be beneficial to personal economy, as well. "A good pair of premium jeans will be in fashion for many seasons, making them a wise investment," Radcliffe says. Averaging out the total

cost over the number of times a woman wears her jeans may translate to just a few cents per wear and definitely makes good old common sense in the long term.

"Premium isn't just about the price, where the item is sold, or the material," Galloway says. "In my opinion, it is most of all about the satisfaction you get in investing in an item that looks good on you."

That sounds like a sound yardstick for women and brands looking to justify the premium for their premium jeans.

This story is one in a series of articles based on findings from Cotton Incorporated's Lifestyle Monitor™ tracking research. Appearing Thursdays in these pages, each story will focus on a specific topic as it relates to the American consumer and her attitudes and behavior regarding clothing, appearance, fashion, fiber selection and many other timely, relevant subjects.



"When buying for our site, I don't typically consider the price point, but whether or not the jean is worth the price."
 — Jamila Galloway, DJPremium.com

Top Five Factors In Considering A Jean Premium Denim	
	Female
Fit/Cut/Length	34%
Brand/Designer Label	27%
Quality/Durability	20%
Style	18%
Price	17%

WWD THURSDAY
 Sportsweat

FASHION

4 Two very different ideas of opulence were on display for fall in Milan, courtesy of Gucci's Frida Giannini and Marni's Consuelo Castiglioni.

GENERAL

1 Despite disappointing earnings and a lagging stock price, Liz Claiborne Inc.'s board is standing by its chief executive officer and his strategy.

3 Amid the frenzy of last-minute Oscar preparations, the usual glut of marketing and freebies appears to be a bit muted this year.

8 In his bestseller, "Gomorrah," Roberto Saviano exposes the long-term relationship between Italy's fashion industry and the Mafia.

21 **BEAT:** Modern Amusement, the men's line worn by celebrities such as Ashton Kutcher, is introducing its first women's sportswear collection.

24 **EYE:** The bash Vanity Fair threw for its Hollywood issue provided revelry that's been missing from the strike-clouded run-up to the Oscars.

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In Brief

● **CACHAREL CEO GONE:** Philippe Cardon, who was hired in the fall as chief executive officer of Paris label Cacharel, has been let go by the contemporary sportswear firm. Cardon had been working on an expansion plan for Cacharel, including the opening of some 20 stores. It is believed he clashed over strategy with Cacharel owner Jean Bousquet. Cacharel in October hired U.K. duo Mark Eley and Wakako Kishimoto to invigorate its fashion line.

● **VALVO TO BE HONORED:** Carmen Marc Valvo will be awarded the 2008 Pratt Institute Fashion Icon award at the school's annual runway show May 7 at the Altman Building. He follows in the footsteps of Narciso Rodriguez and Diane von Furstenberg, who received the honor in 2007 and 2006, respectively. Valvo launched his label of sportswear and eveningwear in 1989, after working for Nina Ricci and Christian Dior. His offerings now include sportswear, eveningwear, daytime dresses under the CMV by Carmen Marc Valvo label, fine furs, swimwear, lingerie and eyewear. Over the years, Valvo has dressed celebrities such as Beyoncé Knowles, Jennifer Hudson, Katie Couric and Oprah Winfrey. A celebrity guest will present the award to Valvo after introducing a short video about his career.

● **POLLINI LICENSES:** Italian shoe and leather accessories brand Pollini SpA is branching out into umbrellas and neckwear. Pollini, which is part of Italian fashion group Aeffe SpA, said it had signed five-year deals with Drops Srl for the manufacture of umbrellas and Larioseta SpA for the manufacture and distribution of neckwear, including women's shawls, women's and men's scarves and ties. Both licenses come into effect for fall. Aeffe SpA, which listed on the Milan Stock Exchange STAR segment for small companies in July, also operates the Alberta Ferretti and Moschino brands and produces collections for Jean Paul Gaultier. Pollini contributed 18 percent of Aeffe SpA revenues in 2007.

Correction

Roustam Tariko's name was misspelled in an Eye story on page 4, Tuesday.



See all the fall 2008 collections and read WWD's reviews, reportage and analysis at WWD.com/fashionweek/fall2008.

Oscar Week Fashion Frenzy Evolves

By Marcy Medina

The hallways of the Four Seasons, Peninsula and L'Ermitage hotels in Beverly Hills once looked like a Rodeo Drive of designer suites in the pre-Oscars hubbub — but this year is different.

The 14-week writers' strike that jeopardized the 80th annual extravaganza before ending last week appears to have reduced the number of gift suites. In addition, more fashion houses now have VIP salons in their boutiques and others prefer to send their sketches, gowns and celebrity dressers directly to the homes of stars and stylists.

"I spend most of my time this week working in my office, with Julie and a tailor," said stylist Tanya Gill, who is dressing best actress nominee Julie Christie. "Designers are very much focused and they just pick one or two people to work with. They deliver the things to you."

Gill has noticed there are fewer suites, though she tries to visit those that have set up shop. "It's not only respectful of all the beautiful things that get flown to Los Angeles, but it's important to see what's out there because things can change at the last minute and you have to be prepared," she said.

But the biggest names in fashion still jockey to dress top actresses and do their jewelry and makeup for the show on Sunday, which can lead to millions of dollars worth of publicity and help boost the bottom line.

The Oscars generate an estimated \$130 million for the local economy alone, according to the Los Angeles Economic Development Corp. This includes \$51 million spent by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for the ceremony and all related events; \$56 million in studio spending on Oscar campaigns; \$5 million in gifting and "perk" related business; \$3 million on parties (this is usually \$4 million but cancellations this year brought it down), and \$2.5 million on hotels.

The mood in Hollywood may have affected fine jewelers the most. Many actresses didn't break out the diamonds for last month's Screen Actors Guild Awards — as proven by Marion Cotillard's pairing of a small and simple white gold Chopard pendant with diamonds to go with her Nina Ricci gown.

"A lot of people in the luxury industry have had a tough time," said Diamond Information Center director Sally Morrison. "The economy was uncertain last year.... For the jewelry industry, it's a difficult moment. But for the superelite brands, it's business as usual."

Morrison said that, if there's less marketing, it's because of the shortened awards season and uncertainty about the Oscars. "Many companies either didn't com-

mit or make plans until they could see what was going on," she said.

There are two basic approaches to marketing jewelry during Oscar week. One is to take a suite and show everyone everything, with the goal of getting press and building relationships rather than dressing specific people. The other is to target celebrities or stylists exclusively.

"If you are really serious about dressing a nominee, you can't show the jewelry to many people," Morrison said. "It's the ultimate fashion moment and they want to be wearing something that hasn't been seen outside of their house."

But jewelers such as Harry Winston and Kwiat have hopes of dressing nominees and presenters, and are showing jewelry such as rare colored gemstones and diamonds. Winston gathered significant pieces from its 18 boutiques across the globe for its Beverly Hills store.

Kwiat, the Manhattan-based diamond jewelry firm, scaled back its celebrity efforts because of the strike, but continued to dress the likes of Sienna Miller, Ali Larter and Anna Friel for smaller red-carpet events.

For the Oscars, Kwiat hosted a three-day suite for the fourth year at the Four Seasons hotel to showcase its jewels for celebrities, stylists and the media.

Fine watch firm Ebel shared the Penthouse suite at the Sunset Tower Hotel with jeweler Kara Ross and designer J.Mendel for the second year. Ebel is showcasing several vintage-style watches and Ross is offering her jewelry and handbag collection. New to the assortment is a collection of petite evening clutches made of satin and topped off with Ross' signature gemstone closure.

"Because of the price of gold being higher than it has been in years and certain jewelry companies paying celebrities to wear their gems, we decided to focus on the handbags," said Robyn Brooks, vice president of Kara Ross.

Others devised alternative events in case the Oscars were canceled. Cultured diamond company Gemesis hosted a Valentine's Day program at Frances Klein jewelers in Beverly Hills to introduce pieces to celebrities and meet with stylists who have Oscar clients. Gemesis brand ambassador Joan Parker said jewelers are being more selective about who they dress and focusing on actresses without preexisting deals. "Everyone is narrowing down their lists so they don't waste their efforts," she said.

Like fine jewelry firms, several beauty companies toned down their Academy Awards blitz. Skin care leader Sonya Dakar and hair care specialist Frédéric Fekkai, both of whom transformed their Beverly Hills facilities into gifting outfits with a number of vendors in previous Oscar seasons, have opted to focus solely on their own brands instead of holding multibrand events.

Oscar makes his way to the Kodak Theatre in Hollywood.

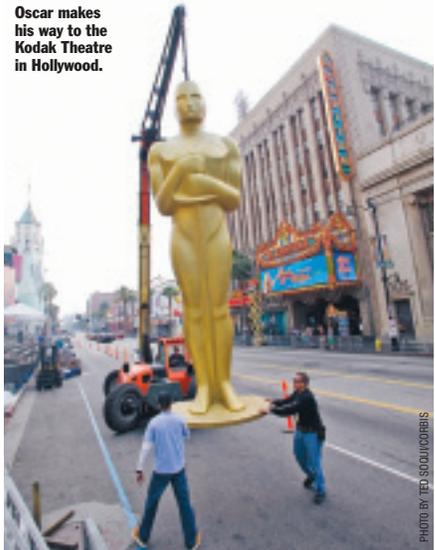


PHOTO BY TED SOUNDCORPIS

Estée Lauder has no Oscar program, although brands under the Lauder umbrella (Michael Kors, for instance) are represented at suites.

Despite the cost, many beauty companies insist that participating in the pre-Oscars courtship of Hollywood notables is a valuable investment. Matrix-owned professional hair care brand Biolage is setting up a spa and salon at the Thompson Beverly Hills hotel along with partner Elle magazine, at which hair stylist Mark Townsend will perfect celebrity dos. L'Oréal-owned hair color treatment brand PureOlogy is at the TMG Luxury Suites, while L'Oréal Paris is the official sponsor of the Oscars broadcast and is providing a compact designed by Kwiat to nominated actresses.

"It is about the brand exposure," said Darienne Howe, director of public relations at PureOlogy. "It is a small brand. Hopefully, people will go to salons and talk about it."

— With contributions from Sophia Chabbott, Rachel Brown and Anne Riley-Katz

Kira Plastinina Set for Full-Force U.S. Entry

By David Moin

THE RUSSIAN IS COMING.

Kira Plastinina, the 15-year-old design phenom from Moscow, is ready to storm the U.S. this year with a strategy for opening stores on both coasts.

At least a dozen units in the New York and Los Angeles metropolitan areas will be operating by the end of July, Bob



Kira Plastinina

Higgins, senior vice president, retail development and operations of Kira Plastinina, said Wednesday. A minimum of 50 U.S. stores are envisioned by 2010.

"We actually feel like we are being real cautious and strategic," Higgins said. "The stores are either on premier streets or in A malls."

The collection emphasizes denim, tops and day and evening dresses. Plastinina has an average price point of \$48 and is aimed at girls and women aged 15 to 25 who crave fashion.

Plastinina's first U.S. store is to open May 2 at 594 Broadway between Houston and Prince Streets in SoHo. The 3,100-square-foot site, which has 2,500 square feet for selling, is projected to generate \$3 million in volume, Higgins said.

Two additional Manhattan leases have been signed: a 3,500-square-foot store at 509 Fifth Ave., between 42nd and 43rd Streets, and a 5,600-square-foot unit at 22 West 34th Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues.

In Los Angeles, Plastinina is taking a 3,450-square-foot space at 1413 Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica, and a 1,400-square-foot space at 346 North Beverly Drive. Locations also are set for Stamford Town Center in Connecticut and Beverly Center in Los Angeles.

PBS Real Estate principals Laura Pomerantz and Betty Ende represented Kira Plastinina in all seven transactions. Ende said the objective is to locate near other tenants that draw junior or



A rendering of the Kira Plastinina store.

young contemporary customers, and where there is a level of affluence.

Like many girls her age, Kira takes in a diet of pop culture. She loves Paris Hilton and the Olsen twins, Italian craftsmanship and hot pink.

Higgins described the store prototype as "very feminine, with a boutique setting and a contemporary exterior — not mass market or like the Gap.... This is definitely a specialty store experience, very residential and very comfortable. We're tak-

ing the DNA from the Russian stores and blowing it up a little bit and having some fun. There are touches of white, metals and wood, and Kira's signature pink."

Plastinina, who turns 16 in June, is backed by her father Sergey Plastin, director of Wimm-Bill-Dann Foods ADS, Russia's largest dairy and fruit producer. "Sergey would like to have 500 stores internationally," Higgins said. "Right now we have somewhere around 40 in the Russian Federation."

Planet Luxe

Two very different visions of style and luxury came courtesy of Gucci's Frida Giannini and Marni's Consuelo Castiglioni. While Giannini went for broke with splashy Seventies redux, Castiglioni opted for understatement with high-shine fabrics and romantic ruffles.

MILAN
fall '08



Gucci: Talk about fascinating. By objective standards, Frida Giannini's still-young tenure at Gucci is a wild success. Her numbers are gaudier than Tom Ford's ever were, with not only the accessories fueling the frenzy, but the clothes, as well. Business is booming around the world, exploding in Asia-Pacific, Russia and the Middle East, and as for the U.S., adjusting for currency, sales leapt 14.7 percent last year.

That mind-boggling litany of facts made sitting at the show Giannini staged on Wednesday night a confounding experience because it made one rethink one's own judgments. What is luxury? What is chic? What should high-end fashion look like? Quite simply, Giannini's collection didn't fit easily into standard notions of any of the above. Not a slam, but

an observation. It was overwrought, garish, at times derivative of her Gucci Group colleague Nicolas Ghesquière, and though beautifully crafted, didn't look at all rich from the runway, but more like a fun, contemporary romp in which a girl can indulge briefly and then move on. Certainly not a collection in which to sink serious money. But the numbers don't lie, so who's not getting it here?

Giannini called the show Gucci Boho, and said she wanted to create a bohemian-rock 'n' roll hybrid with a "profound sense of rich decadence," and with elements of the Twenties and more obviously, the Seventies. She opened with a series of racy jackets over tight pants tucked into boots, everything fringed, furred, passementiered and with more metal work than a

periodic table. Not a bad look, but handled with no particular deftness. Similarly her dresses, sexy little drop-waist numbers in evocative, earthy prints, looked plenty appealing at first glance, but too often these also got the kitchen-sink treatment with embroideries, epaulets, belts, studs and dangling charms.

It was a few ideas with a whole lot going on, resulting in a visual frenzy sparked in part by the character potpourri that is the The Citizens Band, whose pictures inspired the designer. But that group, alas, is a latter-day vaudeville act. Nevertheless, Giannini's message was one of flamboyant mayhem with a hefty price tag, and if this reviewer didn't quite get it, the Gucci coffers offer ample evidence that millions of women around the world will.



Marni

Marni



Marni



Marni



Marni

Marni: Restraint isn't all about gray sheaths and slick, ladylike glamour. It has a more poetic side as well, a side Consuelo Castiglioni put on full display in the delightful Marni collection she showed on Wednesday morning. Castiglioni shelved the techno-athletic elements she has cottoned to of late (but not the unmistakable nod toward Prada), making way for a more overtly romantic expression of her artsy signature, one that might be taken for eccentric were it not for the careful calculation behind the clean cuts and precision layerings. These created a graphic prettiness and, along with furs of the modified *au sauvage* sort, perfectly tempered the show's girly undercurrent.

This collection was all about texture, color and the occasional abundant asymmetric ruffle, worn in unfussy multiples, often belted. Furs came big, shaggy and in flamboyant pastels or earthy naturals, many in terrific capes or vests to show off a slick green leather tunic or topping a belted jacket tucked into pink tweed pants. Throughout, woolly plaids and tweeds played against more refined suitings and high-shine fabrics, combinations Castiglioni was able to work with gusto given her penchant for dressing in pieces. Still, she offered a lovely assortment of faux prim, optical-print dresses. And she did her part for the glitz-for-day trend with sequined collars that were both bold and charming.

PHOTOS BY GIOVANNI GARDINO AND DANIELE MASTRI

Fashion Scoops

COSTUME PARTY: Movie costume lovers got an eyeful of their favorite film moments Tuesday night at the 10th Annual Costume Designers Guild Awards at the Beverly Wilshire, where the winners included **Julie Weiss** for "Blades of Glory," **Colleen Atwood** for "Sweeney Todd," **Ruth Myers** for "The Golden Compass" and **Eduardo Castro** for "Ugly Betty." Of course, Bulgari-designed awards also were handed out to studio head **Paula Wagner**, director **James Mangold** and producer **Cathy Konrad**, though one wonders if the costume connection (a stretch at best) was devised to lure A-list presenters (and "Batman Returns" co-stars) **Katie Holmes** and **Christian Bale**. After all, Wagner's film reel — introduced by Holmes — consisted mostly of **Tom Cruise** clips (her producing partner and co-United Artists Entertainment owner). Presenting to real-life partners Mangold and Konrad, who collaborated with **Ariane Phillips** in "Walk the Line" and "3:10 to Yuma," star Bale said, "I like to think of them as clothes, not costumes. That word makes me feel like I'm putting on another superhero suit."



Petra Nemcova

Inés Sastre

Michelle Yeoh

PHOTOS BY STEPHANE FOLGERE

CHILD'S PLAY: **Carolina Kostner**, the two-time defending European figure-skating champion, twirled into **Roberto Cavalli's** show on Wednesday for a hot second. "I'm just here for the afternoon, then I've got to skip off back to training," the Italian said. A gaggle of models and actresses also lined Cavalli's front row, headlined by busy **Michelle Yeoh**, who has three movies coming out this year: "The Children of Huang Shi"; "Babylon A.D.," where Yeoh plays a nun opposite **Vin Diesel**, and "The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor." "The Children of Huang Shi" was filmed in China and is

based on the true story of a Scottish man who rescued children from an orphanage during the Second World War. "It was emotional to meet the real survivors who are now in their 80s," Yeoh related.

Czech model **Petra Nemcova** is busy with Happy Hearts Fund, a children's charity she set up three years ago. The 28-year-old just got back from Peru, where she said HHF plans to help rebuild schools following August's earthquake in the coastal province of Ica. And she's calling in her fashion contacts. Cavalli donated two tickets to Wednesday's show for a fund-raiser in New York in October, which raised \$3.5 million for HHF.

Meanwhile, **Inés Sastre** and **Tasha De Vasconcelos** are each working on a comedy, filmed in Italy and France, respectively. "I'm excited because it's my first film in two years," said Sastre, who is also Lancôme's face. De Vasconcelos said the movie she is working on with **Richard Berry** is "sort of the European version of 'American Sweetheart.'"

MAYBE BABY: Parenting can be tough. Since giving birth to her first son, **George**, last year, **Eva Herzigova** has had to put her swimwear line on hold. "It was my little baby," Herzigova said of the project, while at Cavalli's show. "But since I have my own now, it's really hard to follow....Unless I get a license deal, I don't think I'll do it."

HOT SHOT: **Hedi Slimane** is taking on haute couture — as a photographer, that is. The former Dior Homme designer lensed a 14-page feature on the summer high fashion collections for French Vogue's forthcoming April issue. "It's magnificent," editor in chief **Carine Roitfeld** said at Gucci's show on Wednesday. But as colorful as the collections were, Slimane stuck with his signature black and white. Condé Nast International chairman **Jonathan Newhouse** also made it to Gucci after attending festivities in Paris Tuesday night for the launch of French GQ. He said the March issue, with a double cover — one with text, the second with actor **Vincent Cassel** — carried 121 pages of advertising, some 50 over budget. Coming up this fall is the launch of a monthly Vanity Fair in Spain.

FINLAY, OUT: Industry sources said this year will mark the end of Lord & Taylor's partnership with Finlay Enterprises Inc. Earlier this month, L&T's parent company, NRDC Equity Partners, entered into an agreement to purchase Fortunoff for \$110 million. Finlay operates licensed fine jewelry departments in department stores throughout the U.S., including Bloomingdale's, Macy's and Dillard's. As of November, the firm operated in 691 department store locations. Finlay recently acquired the 70-store jewelry chain Bailey Banks & Biddle from Zale Corp. for \$200 million. "At this point, Finlay's contract with Lord & Taylor runs through the end of the fiscal year, January 2009," said **LaVelle Olexa**, senior vice president of advertising, sales promotion and public relations for Lord & Taylor. Calls to Finlay were not returned Wednesday.

See all the fall 2008 collections and read WWD's reviews, reportage and analysis at WWD.com/fashionweek/fall2008.

6267

Grand, Girly and Artsy

The fall collections offered considerable variety, including lean and serene looks, feminine party frocks and graphic, colorful patchwork styles.

6267: The fashion crowd wants a buzzy boost in Milan, and they've been rooting for Tommaso Aquilano and Roberto Rimondi. Six seasons in, their fall collection showed that they are indeed up to the mantle. Staged under a cathedral ceiling to the sounds of a live eight-piece string ensemble, the presentation set a tone of serene grandeur — of the more Paris than Milan sort — one that was echoed entirely by the lineup. Black, white and an occasional shot of pale pink governed the quiet palette, which expanded to include inky prints. As for silhouettes, whether long and lean, as in maxi military coats and body-skimming, vaguely Asian dresses, or quietly voluminous, they were always sharp. While several pieces were lavished with feather embroideries and beading, the main flourishes came by way of architectural curves, on swinging skirts, cocoon coats and dramatic collars that were curled out of silk. Aquilano and Rimondi should be careful not to get carried away with the decorative tubing effects, or referencing, for that matter. Notes of Balenciaga fall 2006 rang clear as a bell with the silver-buttoned epaulet coats and the black-and-white checked fare. Still, the level of sophistication and execution was far above par.



Roberto Cavalli

MILAN
fall '08

PHOTOS BY GIOVANNI GIANNINI, DAVIDE MAESTRI AND MAURICO MIRANDA

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Roberto Cavalli



Antonio Marras



Agnona

Loro Piana

more from the shows...

Agnona: Discreet luxury is Agnona's forte, and its fur-collared cardigans, funnel-neck chevron coats and ribbed knit peacoats, many in oatmeal cashmere, are the sort of timeless staples the Agnona woman covets.

Loro Piana: Loro Piana took a breather from its tech-savvy fare and went back to unadulterated luxury with its latest trademark, Baby Cashmere, done double-faced in a stylish, silky white cape with a silvery sable collar and in some covetable cable knits in velvety shades of taupe, beige and dove gray.

Dusan: Working with a rounded silhouette, designer Dusan Paunovic did easy, throw-it-on chic in a lineup of attractive, fluid outerwear such as oversize silk and wool *dégradé* blazers, choc-and-navy cashmere blanket coats and an egg-shaped silk plissé parka.



Krizia

Krizia: Mariuccia Mandelli dubbed her collection "Seven Types of Ambiguity," and it seemed apt, because, aside from a few appealing architectural coats and column gowns, most of the lineup, including a giant-paillette skirt and a bristly bottle brush-like frock, was simply baffling.

Roberto Cavalli: Sorry, sexy ladies, Roberto Cavalli's apparently gone soft for fall. The sultan of sizzle shelved his signature bombshell — not a gauzy animal print or sexy siren dress in sight — in favor of the girl next door, an old-fashioned one, no less. She started out as sweet and dainty, turned out for tea in floral-print and eyelet party frocks that were fitted through the bodice and bloomed into full, Fifties-style skirts. And by the show's end, she was off to a prom in a lace or ruffled dress, topped off with a corsage and tiara. Such dated innocence was confounding, even more so considering the Parisian-opera backdrop. Factor in the strange exotic interlude of dresses, fur-trimmed waistcoats and shearling coats done up in exotic floral embroideries the color of stained glass, and it was obvious what this collection needed. It comes in the form of a little blue pill.

Antonio Marras: In his show notes Antonio Marras said that he accidentally stumbled upon a Charlotte Salomon exhibition in New York and became obsessed with the power of the artist's work and colors. But Marras steered clear of a literal interpretation, using the inspiration to enhance his signature tailoring skills and love of interesting fabric mixes. He worked the artsy references via one of his specialties — collages of varied fabrics and textures, both matte and shiny. This time, the effect was graphic and colorful, as he crafted patchworks into short-sleeve coats with rounded drop shoulders, full strapless dresses with pleated fronts and loose tank tops. Marras also flexed his sartorial muscle with a more mannish silhouette that included pants and lots of beefy wool double-breasted coats, slim blazers and boxy jackets. In Marras' hands, a little power dressing with an artsy bent can go a long way.



An Austrian Air

Derek Lam keeps right on flexing that design savvy over at Tod's. For fall, he turned his gaze to Austria's turn-of-the-century style, and delivered some smart outerwear options, such as the lush shearling-and-suede coat with a bold fox collar. "There's a sense of classicism that Vienna has, a sense of luxury, warmth and culture," said Lam. Other looks included a crocheted Viennese patchwork skirt with mink trim and a fitted, quilted jacket inspired by, intriguingly enough, boar hunting in Italy's Piedmont region. (Who says his Austrian miss can't indulge in a little wanderlust?) Accessories got a similar dose of wintry luxe. To wit, croc booties flaunted a chic tuft of fur up top. Then there were the handbags, including a gotta-have-it doctor's bag. A little bit constructed, a little bit slouchy, it comes in a variety of finishes, colors and sizes. Pointing to a motley group of smaller shapes, Lam quipped, "It's like a pastry shop in Salzburg."

Book Illuminates Role of Organized Crime in Italian Fashion

By Alessandra Ilari

MILAN — “Fashion reunites all the big flows of capital of organized crime: cocaine, transportation and distribution,” said Roberto Saviano, author of the critically acclaimed bestseller “Gomorra,” about the influence of the Neapolitan Mafia, or *Camorra*, throughout Italian society. “To my mind, fashion is one of the most infiltrated markets of the criminal underworld,” Saviano added, slouched on a gray sofa in the headquarters of his publisher, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore.

In his book, the author describes in detail the interaction between fashion and the *Camorra* via illegal workshops and factories, how fashion is also a vehicle for money laundering, the industry’s ties with Chinese textile suppliers and the lightning speed at which the region’s workshops can turn out perfectly crafted pieces — but at the cost to workers of long hours and underpaid shifts. It tells of auctions for contracts where the winning formula for manufacturers seeking to produce for luxury brands is highest quantity-lowest price-shortest time frame.

But while Saviano names top *Camorra* bosses in the book, he doesn’t cite or criticize individual fashion companies in order to avoid lawsuits, he said.

Giuseppe Bottillo, commanding officer of the Guardia di Finanza di Napoli, or fiscal police, told WWD the main issue is to keep manufacturers from operating illegally.

“During our controls, we found small manufacturers that hired their workers illegally violating labor laws and safety standards,” said Bottillo. “When this happens, they close them down, but it’s harder to prove ties with the *Camorra*.”

Fashion’s attraction to manufacturing in the Naples region stems from the area’s long-standing sartorial traditions, said Bottillo. Lately, though, many factories have been forced to cut corners — including in their labor standards — due to cutthroat competition from the Far East.

In the book, Saviano dedicates the second chapter, titled “Angelina Jolie,” to fashion. The chapter heading references the fact that the actress donned a Dolce & Gabbana (Saviano doesn’t cite the brand, but a quick bit of research does the trick) cream satin pantsuit to the 2001 Oscars, an outfit he alleges was made by his friend Pasquale in a *Camorra*-controlled sweatshop in Secondigliano in Naples.

“It’s the system. If you want to be clean in fashion today, or respect every step, you wouldn’t survive and the Made in Italy [label] would die,” contended Saviano. “Most often, the houses are burdened by quantity and subcontract the production, but then lose track of the cycles.”

Top fashion houses disagree and insist such allegations don’t apply to their operations.

A Prada spokesman said the “practices evoked by Saviano in ‘Gomorra’ cannot be applied to the Prada Group” and that its apparel isn’t produced in the Neapolitan district.

Prada said it uses five main suppliers and six subcontractors for the brand’s leather goods, all of which are companies that Prada knows well, are regularly reg-



“It’s the system. If you want to be clean in fashion today, or respect every step, you wouldn’t survive and the Made in Italy [label] would die.”

— Roberto Saviano

istered at the Chamber of Commerce and have underwritten the ethics policy and quality standards imposed by the fashion house. “Our inspectors regularly and randomly visit these companies,” said the spokesman.

Prada also responded to Saviano’s allegations that fashion houses don’t keep an accurate inventory of raw materials, a scenario that can result in a production surplus the *Camorra* happily takes advantage of by selling it on the side.

The Prada spokesman said, “To avoid [any risk of] excessive production, we have full control over the raw materials we supply in terms of quality and quantity. The total traceability of our raw materials, the frequency with which we supply our raw materials and the many control phases make Saviano’s [thesis] inapplicable to Prada Group brands.”

A Dolce & Gabbana spokesperson claimed the firm is “sensitive and attentive to the social responsibility of the company and, in light of that, demand that its external manufacturers guarantee the respect of safety standards and of the workers’ rights.”

Versace said its clothes are produced in ateliers and small showrooms by expert dressmakers and tailors. “Not only does Versace put a label on every Versace item that states ‘Made in Italy,’ but we also have a label that affirms that each piece and item is made and produced in a Versace-owned Italian factory,” said chief executive officer Giancarlo Di Risio.

Despite these controls by major fashion houses, Saviano contends the Mob’s tentacles reach all levels of fashion, from cheap, Canal Street copies to ones made

so well that he challenges even the designers to tell the fakes from the real thing.

Often, if a fashion house rejects a garment because of a minor imperfection, the tag is counterfeited, allowing the Mob to then sell it to retailers without the knowledge of the brands — or the store.

“The market should have better rules, meaning that under a certain threshold you shouldn’t accept a contract, but that would be antiliberal,” said Saviano. “The fashion houses should judge the various manufacturers that operate at low costs to see who invests in research, in scholarships, etc.”

Part of the book’s impact has been that Saviano names many names and doesn’t mince words when it comes to the rage and rancor he nurtures toward the Neapolitan *Camorra* in the hope of changing the system. And it is one he knows well. Born in Casal di Principe, where the Mob’s power is tangible, he spent his youth riding his Vespa between his hometown, Scampia, Secondigliano and other *Camorra*-controlled Neapolitan suburbs.

Sporting a gray blazer, a red sweater and ink-blue jeans, Saviano is down-to-earth with deep, penetrating dark eyes that light up when he breaks into his many grins. He’s certainly got guts — and now he has glory, albeit of the unconventional kind.

After the unexpected success of “Gomorra,” which covers not only the Mob’s influence in fashion but also in everything from the Italian drug trade to garbage dumping, the 28-year-old author was catapulted to fame but had to accept state protection following death threats from top *Camorra* clans. He’s the first author in Italy to require such protection.

“Gomorra” has sold two million copies worldwide to date and has been translated into 33 languages. Saviano has garnered major media attention and will attend the PEN World Voices Festival of International Literature, an event chaired by Salman Rushdie, that will take place in New York at the end of April.

“If the book had sold a few thousand copies, [*Camorra* bosses] would have passed it around bragging,” said Saviano. “Books on the Mafia are generally easy reads or complicated scientific essays. Mine is in between, which explains its success.”

Saviano’s wish is to see the *Camorra* finally release its grip.

“Many of my friends hate me because they think I wrote the book for money and that I denigrated our hometowns,” said the author. “I’m different, simply more ambitious because I thought I could use words to change them. I want to change that wave, not ride it, like many of my friends.”

Women’s Apparel Prices See 3rd Straight Rise

By Evan Clark

An inflationary pattern is developing in women’s retail apparel prices.

For the third straight month, retail prices for women’s apparel rose a seasonally adjusted 0.6 percent in January, following a 0.5 percent rise in December and a 0.6 percent bump in November. This follows a long-term deflationary cycle for the sector.

Against a year ago, however, prices on women’s apparel were still down 1.4 percent, according to the Labor Department’s Consumer Price Index released Wednesday.

Within the women’s category, outerwear prices rose 4.9 percent during January and were 4.2 percent ahead of a year earlier, as suit and separates increased 0.5 percent for the month and fell 1 percent for the 12-month period.

In general, apparel retailers last month did not discount fall and winter merchandise as much as they usually do and were able to boost prices on goods they sell all year long, said Jessica Penrose, an economist at the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Looking at the overall retail landscape, Penrose said stores are more hesitant.

“They’re not buying as much and they’re not buying as many out-there kinds of things, trendy and really fashionable,” she said. “They’re trying to stick with staples that they know will sell.”

The recent increase in apparel prices may also be a distant ripple of the inflation in the Chinese economy, where costs are on the rise and tougher labor

laws have been put in place.

Still in the midst of a growth spurt, China, which accounts for 34.4 percent of U.S. apparel imports, saw its CPI jump 7.1 percent last month versus a year earlier, the biggest gain in more than 11 years.

“We are seeing Chinese inflation bleed into the U.S. marketplace,” said Peter Morici, professor at the University of Maryland’s Robert H. Smith School of Business. “There’s going to be some upward [price] pressure on apparel coming out of China.”

The January rise in apparel was joined by higher prices in other sectors, from transportation and medical care to education and communications, that combined to drive price tags on all goods and services up 0.4 percent, after a 0.4 percent rise December and 0.9 percent jump in November.

The so-called core prices, which exclude the volatile food and energy areas, rose 0.3 percent, an acceleration following nine straight months of 0.2 percent increases.

Although data from just one month are prone to statistical anomalies, the higher-than-anticipated rise in core prices might be enough to take some steam out of any future Federal Reserve Board cuts in interest rates.

“The Fed will not so easily dismiss the January acceleration,” Global Insight U.S. economist Kenneth Beauchemin wrote in an analysis. “The broadly based nature of the acceleration within the composition of the core index sharpens the signal and suggests a true inflationary process as opposed to an unlucky combination of a few large price increases.”

Conference Board: Recession Unlikely

A recession in the U.S. is “unlikely” as companies post higher profits and consumers continue to buy goods, says The Conference Board in a report Wednesday.

“While the correction in the financial sector is just beginning, the correction in the housing sector is nearly over,” said Gail D. Fosler, The Conference Board’s president and chief economist. She said the economic shocks from the contracting financial sector are not enough to tip the U.S. into a recession.

Fosler said that, while there are similarities between the current environment and the period leading up to the 1990 recession, there are sufficient differences, too. “The business sector today is fundamentally stronger than at any time since the Sixties, and the booming exports are helping support solid and continued structural productivity gains. Also, the policy sector is moving to establish a solid floor of tax and interest rate cuts to support the economy,” she explained.

In addition, she attributed the sluggishness of consumer spending to the rise in gas prices. However, she pointed out that total wage and salary growth is about 5 percent on an annualized basis.

Her conclusion was that “income gains” continue to be reasonably strong.

On Wall Street, investors took solace that the Federal Reserve was not concerned with inflationary pressures. As a result, the S&P 500 gained 0.8 percent to 1,360.03. The S&P Retail Index leapt 2.1 percent to 397.18.

— Vicki M. Young

Coty Set to Bring Rimmel Brand Into China

NEW YORK — Coty Inc. plans to introduce its Rimmel color cosmetics brand in China in May via a licensing agreement with Tokyo-based Kosé Corp, the firms said Wednesday.

The pact, which follows a 2006 deal between the two companies for Kosé to distribute Rimmel in Japan, calls for Kosé to manufacture and distribute Rimmel products in China. Kosé will initially begin importing and distributing Rimmel items including foundation, mascara, lipstick and eye shadow to selected department stores and drugstores in China in the spring.

The China deal is part of a larger initiative to grow Rimmel throughout Asia, according to Coty.

"By commencing distribution in China, Coty is accelerating the global brand presence of Rimmel and simultaneously continuing the elevation of Coty's global presence," stated Bernd Beetz, chief executive officer of Coty Inc. "We look forward to continuing our successful business alliance [with Kosé] that will continue to leverage Coty's success in Asia."

Kosé said it aims to leverage its experience developing and launching new products tailored to the Chinese market with Rimmel's hip and edgy positioning to establish the brand as a leader in China.

"We are looking forward to expanding our strategic alliance with Coty and building upon our organizations' collective strengths," stated Kazutoshi Kobayashi, president of Kosé Corp. "We will combine Rimmel's unique style with our expertise to develop and launch products that will appeal to the style of Chinese women."

Rimmel, which was originally launched in the U.K.'s mass market in 1834, is carried in more than 50 countries in Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, Japan and Oceania. The brand, which is currently fronted by Kate Moss, targets women in their late teens to late 20s.

— Michelle Edgar

French Group Ups Communication

PARIS — France's Fédération des Industries de la Parfumerie is getting a makeover.

The cosmetics trade association said Monday it has changed its name to Fédération des Entreprises de la Beauté (or French Federation of Fragrance, Cosmetics and Toiletries) and unveiled a communication strategy meant to boost consumer confidence in the beauty industry.

The association, which represents 300 companies that together generate 97 percent of France's cosmetics sales, also launched an informational Web site for consumers and unveiled a research program into well-being.

This follows a similar move by the Cosmetic, Toiletry and Fragrance Association in the U.S., which changed its name to the Personal Care Products Council in November.

The FEBEA name change was designed to reflect the scope of businesses FEBEA represents, which includes all cosmetics categories, while its proactive communication stance is a response to increasingly demanding consumers. "The consumer is becoming more and more vigi-

lant," said Alain Grangé Cabane, the federation's president. "The consumer is very informed, but sometimes misinformed."

BEAUTY BEAT

A new Web site for consumers, called Parlonscosmetiques.com ("Let's talk about cosmetics," in English), went live Monday with the aim of assuaging increasing concerns over product safety and offering a behind-the-scenes view of the industry. It includes expert interviews and an ingredients guide, plus advice on using and

preserving cosmetics.

FEBEA also plans to begin a study on French people's attitudes to well-being later this year and has established a research program on well-being with a panel of eight experts, which includes Jean-Paul Marty, a dermo pharmacologist and cosmetologist, and Robert Rochefort, an economist and statistician. FEBEA will also help fund two to three research projects on well-being annually.

— Ellen Groves

Varvatos Dinner Fetes Launch

LOS ANGELES — John Varvatos hosted a dinner for VIPs at the

Terrace Bar at Sunset Towers hotel here last week for the West Coast launch of his first women's fragrance, which made its debut at Saks Fifth Avenue earlier this month.

The dinner, attended by Varvatos fans Priscilla Presley, Gina Gershon and producer Tracey Edmonds, reflected the designer's passion for music. Also there were Velvet Revolver rockers Billy Morrison and Matt Sorum, as well as Camp Freddy frontman Donovan Leitch and composer Diane Warren.

On the day of the dinner, which was held Feb. 11, Varvatos hosted an informal event at his Melrose Avenue store to introduce custom-

ers to the fragrance collection.

Results of the event at the store were said to have included \$40,000 in fashion sales, a quarter of which benefited the Stuart House charity for child victims of sexual abuse, and \$2,000 in fragrance sales, all of which was donated to the charity.

Since its official Feb. 1 launch, sales of the designer's women's scent have totaled \$25,000, exceeding its business plan by 40 percent, according to industry sources.

Customers will get another chance to sample the fragrance at Varvatos' 6th Annual Stuart House Charity Benefit on March 9 at the Melrose store.

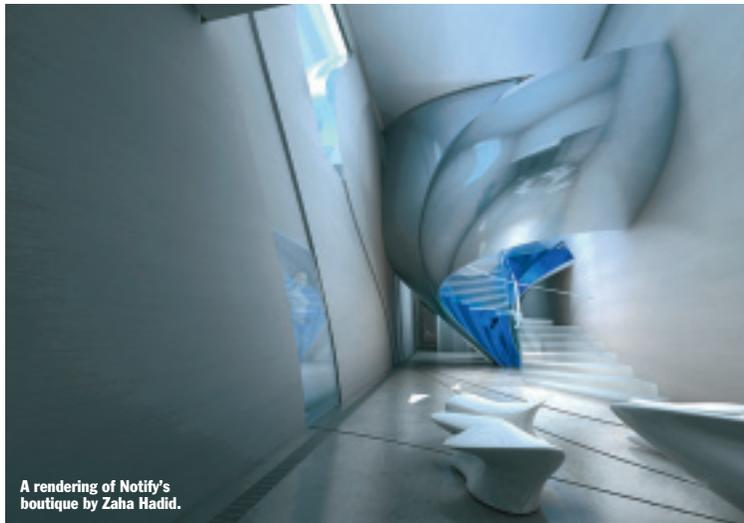
— Marcy Medina



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Paris Preview

EARLY SHOW: Notify Jeans' Maurice Ohayon is giving a by-appointment preview of his forthcoming Paris store designed by Zaha Hadid starting Friday at his showroom-cum-gallery at 38 Rue Etienne Marcel. On show will be architectural models and film projections about the atelier-style boutique, slated to bow in the fall just off the Place du Marché Saint-Honoré. Hadid's futuristic concept boasts a transparent winding staircase, cobalt blue interior and undulating furniture. Notify's upcoming winter collection, a selection of sculpted denim looks and tailored suits for men and women, will also be on display.



A rendering of Notify's boutique by Zaha Hadid.

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL:

Chef Elio Bombace is known among the Paris fashion pack for his shoebox-size restaurant Cibus, which is intimate and delicious. Bombace has opened a second address, on the Rue Saint Roch, which is bigger — but not huge — and based on the same organic products and down-home Italian cooking that made him a favorite among foodies. *Crudus, 21 Rue Saint Roch 75001; +33-1-4260-9029*



Crudus restaurant.

BLACK DIAMONDS:

Fashion spot Caviar Kaspia is getting a taste for more earthly pleasures. The legendary caviar restaurant has purchased and renovated La Maison de la Truffe, a truffle restaurant right next door on the Place de la Madeleine. Living up to its name, the majority of dishes are topped with truffles, including favorites risotto, carpaccio and cream of mushroom soup. *La Maison de la Truffe, 19 Place de la Madeleine; +33-1-4265-5322*



La Maison de la Truffe

Scene

Take a break in the City of Light. By Meredith Batastini, Katya Foreman, Emilie Marsh, Robert Murphy and Jennifer Weil

VINTAGE PASSION: Shoe designer Michel Perry has redecorated his Left Bank shop to showcase his passion for vintage furniture, which he has collected for years in flea markets across Europe. "I see it as a lifestyle space," said Perry, who has arranged pieces of European design objects from the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies in the store, which is an old-stock boutique of Perry's past collections. Some clients have shown as much interest in buying the furniture as shoes, leading one to ponder whether Perry will consider a second career in the near future. *Michel Perry, Collector, 42 Rue de Grenelle, 75007; +33-1-4284-1285*



A photo of the Michel Perry, Collector store on Rue de Grenelle.

PHOTO BY STEFANO BIANCHI

BAG MAN: Hip French bag designer Jerome Dreyfuss, known for his multifunction organic leather bags, has opened his first boutique. The 400-square-foot space is decorated to resemble a Fifties gym changing room. It is situated next door to his wife Isabel Marant's store on the Rue Jacob in Saint Germain. *Jerome Dreyfuss, 1 Rue Jacob, 75006; +33-1-4354-7093*

APRIL FOOLS: Edgy French denim label April 77 is opening its first store, in Paris. It will host a fete for the occasion on Feb. 29. The rock 'n' roll-inspired brand tapped Steven Thomas, the architect behind London's Biba concept store, to design its Paris flagship. "It is a great honor that Steven Thomas decided to take on the project," said Brice Partouche, April 77's creative director and owner. "After Biba, this is only his second fashion retail project." Located on Rue Saintonge, in the heart of the Marais, the 750-square-foot shop will have an Art Deco decor with ultrabright lighting, complemented by flourishes of chrome and wood. *April 77, 49 Rue Saintonge; +33-1-5830-8283*

HOW SWEDE: For her Paris Fashion Week debut, Swedish designer Anika Skärström directed a short film titled "Precious Time." "I chose four models aged 20, 30, 40 and 60 years old to show how the same clothing can be adapted to different moments and different moods," said Skärström, who is based in Paris.

"My muse is always an independent woman, not necessarily rock 'n' roll, but more like a warrior." Skärström will also show looks at a live presentation Monday at the Swedish Cultural Center. Her winter collection boasts a Scandinavian flare for structure, such as a fitted trenchcoat in a cotton-mohair blend with military detailing, plus body-conscious leather skirts, dresses and jackets.



Anika Skärström

PHOTO BY DOMINIQUE MATHIE

A piece Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec are exhibiting at the Kreo Gallery.

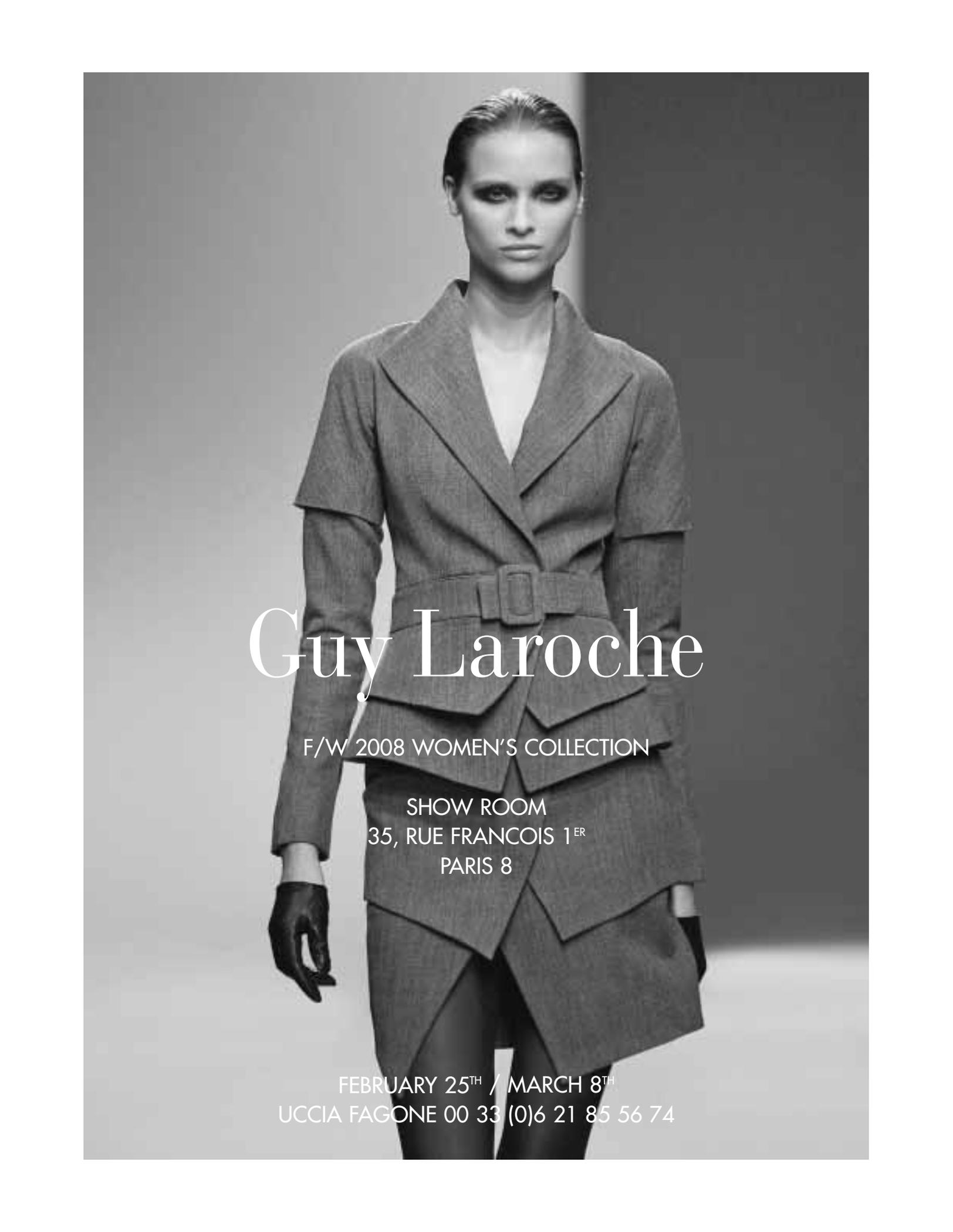


PHOTO BY PAUL YAHONIR-E BOURULLEC

PICTURE PERFECT: Showgoers tired of looking at clothes can enjoy a respite in Paris, which boasts plenty of worthy design and art attractions. On the heels of their show at the Pompidou museum, graphic artists M/M have a pirate-themed exhibition at Air de Paris involving rescued and rehabilitated novels, novellas and letters found in the trash. Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec, meanwhile, have a showing of architecturally designed furniture at the Kreo Gallery. Some 80 pieces of furniture by Pierre Paulin, famous for designing the Elysée Palace interiors twice after the elections of Georges Pompidou and François Mitterrand, will be on display at the Galerie des Gobelins.

On the art front, the Palais Tokyo has given young French artist Loris Gréaud carte blanche for "Cellar Door," an exhibition featuring an original music score and a dreamlike representation of an artist's studio. In addition, works by Fauvist French artist Maurice de Vlaminck are on display at Musée Luxembourg; La Maison Rouge has works by Gregor Schneider, Pilar Albarracín, and Marie Maillard, and Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris has a retrospective of German artist A.R. Penck.

But if photos are more your speed, with a little shopping on the side, Le Bon Marché has hung 160 Ron Galella photographs of Andy Warhol, spanning three decades and featuring such Studio 54 regulars as Bianca Jagger and Halston.



Guy Laroche

F/W 2008 WOMEN'S COLLECTION

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Paris Preview

Ones to Watch

Ungaro ▶

Esteban Cortazar wants to return Emanuel Ungaro to its heritage of ultrafeminine and colorful clothes.

"My designs have always been about unapologetic femininity that is pure and totally natural," explained the 23-year-old Colombian, who was hired in December to succeed Peter Dundas.

"I had that aesthetic growing up," he continued. "I'm Latin and very warm. I love to celebrate women who take care of themselves, are happy and look beautiful. It's the kind of woman who smells delicious."

Cortazar, who will show his freshman effort for the house Feb. 27, said he felt an instant connection with Ungaro's legacy for color, prints and fluid dresses.

"I want to bring lightness back to the brand," he said, explaining that his fall collection was inspired by "natural elements, fluidity and movement."

"The prints are directed to nature and growth," he said. "There is soft color, but also vibrant color. There are a lot of dresses. The main idea was movement, always movement. Ungaro should always be about unapologetic femininity."

Cortazar's arrival chez Ungaro is part of an effort to bring stability to the house, which was purchased by Asim Abdullah, a high-tech entrepreneur, in 2005. The last few seasons have seen a revolving door of designers, including Vincent Darre and Dundas.

In fact, the house has been groping for an identity since the departure of Giambattista Valli, who took over after the retirement of Ungaro in 2004.

"We're not on the radar of young chicks," said Ungaro chief executive Mounir Moufarrige. "We need to have a strong identity and be younger. Esteban is very aware of color and prints. He's perfect for Ungaro. He understands what women want."

Cortazar first gained attention when he launched a signature line in New York at the age of 18 after being taken under the wing of the late Kalman Rottenstein of Bloomingdale's.

"Kal took me to my first fashion shows when I was 14," said Cortazar, who stopped his own collection to concentrate on Ungaro.

Now, the youthful designer said he's ready to turn up the energy.

"Paris feels really creative," he said, adding that he's still living out of a hotel room, having yet to find the time to move into an apartment. "It makes you feel like you can go the extra mile."

— Robert Murphy



PHOTO BY FRANCIS GOISE



Sonia Rykiel

While she's been working with Sonia Rykiel in the studio for the last two years, designer Gabrielle Greiss is preparing to show a bit more of her own colors after being promoted to creative director of the house's top line in December. For Rykiel's fall collection, Greiss, a former Martine Sitbon and Lanvin hand, is taking the house's iconic prints and striped knits into new territory.

"I wanted to reinterpret the [house's] codes and to make them look younger," said Greiss, adding that she played with the idea of a fairy tale for fall.

To wit: swans and rabbits are worked into abstract prints in cute dresses and sweaters. Rhinestones, one of Rykiel's favorite decorative flourishes, are applied sparingly on flirty dresses and pantsuits.

"It's meant to be fun," said Greiss, who will take a bow alongside Rykiel and her daughter Nathalie Rykiel at the house's show on Feb. 29.

— R.M.

Peachoo & Krejberg ▶

India's Peachoo Datwani and Danish designer Roy Krejberg, of Peachoo & Krejberg, will be making their catwalk debut this season. The event will be staged at the Hôtel de Brossier, a dilapidated mansion in Paris' third arrondissement.

Since it was founded in 2004, the label has become known for its architectural construction and play on volume. Datwani's Indian roots are evident in the brand's semiprecious jewelry line as well as touches of hand-embroidery on the clothes.

"Coats will form a strong element of our fall line," said Krejberg, adding that constructed jackets come in "collapsed" washed fabrics such as linen and wool.

A capsule shoe line will also be unveiled. The footwear feature heeled versions of a classic men's shoe.

No stranger among the fashion cognoscenti (Rei Kawakubo stocks the brand in London's Dover Street Market and Tokyo's 10 Corso Como Comme des Garçons), the label is sold in around 70 niche stores internationally. "Next up, we hope to develop distribution within department stores," said Krejberg.

— Katya Foreman



PHOTO BY DOMINIQUE MAITRE



PHOTO BY DOMINIQUE MAITRE

Cacharel

Mark Eley and Wakako Kishimoto want to sharpen Cacharel's fashion edge while building on the contemporary brand's heritage for accessible clothes, youthful prints and color.

The London-based designer couple, who do the Eley Kishimoto line, were hired last October to replace Suzanne Clements and Inancio Ribeiro, who left Cacharel after a seven-year collaboration.

Eley said he and Kishimoto wanted to identify the brand closer with spirited sportswear at good prices. "Cacharel is a diffusion label," said Eley. "But I would like it to have some range. It's meant to entice the young and old."

Eley said he and his wife divided the fall collection into three parts under the title "Good Girl, Rain or Shine." The first part, "School Day Nostalgia," plays with uniform styles and vintage coats. The second, "Weekend," is devoted to relaxed silhouettes for chilling out. "Going Out," the third part, is "for a girl who wants to make a bit more effort," said Eley.

Prints — one of Eley Kishimoto's hallmarks — play an important role in their first effort for Cacharel. They include a graphic "paisley rain" print and another with a cheerful Eiffel Tower arrangement.

Eley said he and Kishimoto planned to keep Cacharel "more approachable" than their own label while also contributing a lot of "subtly and cut" to the clothes.

"We really feel linked to the brand," said Eley. "For us to do it seemed like a perfect match."

The designers' collection will be presented in Cacharel's store on the Left Bank starting Sunday and running through the entirety of Paris Fashion Week.

Next season they plan to bring a more advanced collection to the runway to coincide with the brand's 50th anniversary.

— R.M.

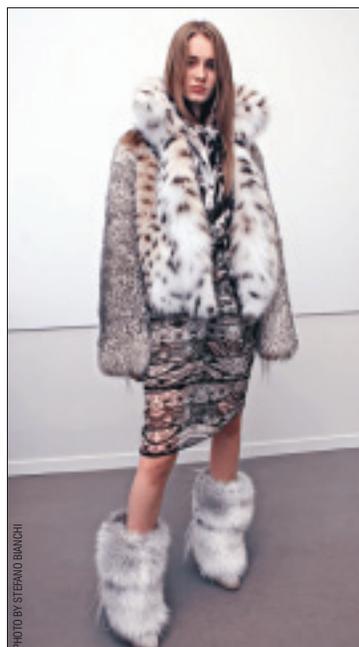


PHOTO BY STERNO BIANCHI

▶ Revillon

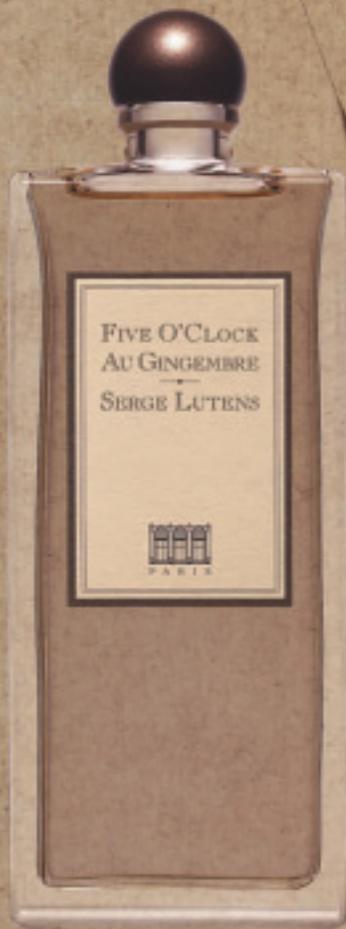
"I've kept up by bad habit of coming in at the last minute," joked Peter Dundas, the former Emanuel Ungaro designer who was appointed creative director of Revillon in January. The French furrier was acquired by Yves Salomon just over a year ago.

Dundas will unveil his first capsule collection for the firm here on Monday at l'Espace Daniel Casanova in the first arrondissement. The strapping Norwegian designer summoned his Nordic roots for the line, opting for "savage" furs, such as white fox, badger, raccoon and lynx. "In Norway, animals turn white in winter so I've stuck to a palette of noncolors such as whites and grays," said the designer, adding that he has also worked traditional Scandinavian embellishments into the coats, lining them with twisted silk ribbon embroidery or forming patchworks of furs.

Focusing on easy, "slouchy" silhouettes that mainly stop mid-thigh, the overall effect is urbane and chic. "I wanted to bring a cooler aesthetic [to the category]," he said, adding that he's been talking to a lot of women about what they want from a fur. "They all agree that they love glamour and sensuality but they don't want to look like their grandmas," said Dundas.

— R.M.

Continued on page 14



Paris Preview

Ones to Watch

Continued from page 12



▲ Iku-Tschüss

One of the freshest emerging young designer brands here is Iku-Tschüss, a handmade clothing line that is a collaboration between fashion stylist Guya Marini and Carmen d'Apollonio, an assistant to the New York-based Swiss artist Urs Fischer. Both second-generation Italians, the 34-year-old globe-trotters grew up together in Zurich. "Our philosophy is to start knitting and see where it takes us; it's a kind of permanent work-in-progress," said Marini.

Silk, wool and cashmere are some of the fabrics that the duo use to fashion their signature scarves, sweaters and knitted hats. It's a labor of love, since Italian and Swiss grandmothers knit the collection, which is sold in Colette in Paris and Plum in Beirut, Lebanon.

"We want to keep to small production lines and maintain a handmade aesthetic," said Marini, adding that a children's line will be added next season.

— Katya Foreman



▲ Jasmin Santanen

After her couture debut in July, Finnish designer Jasmin Santanen will present her first ready-to-wear runway show March 2 at her Rue Saint Antoine showroom. Santanen, who studied at the Parsons School of Design in New York and Paris before gaining expertise at design houses Yves Saint Laurent, Hermès and Josephus Thimister, launched her eponymous label in 2004. For fall, Santanen channeled Dalida, Maria Callas and Elvis through body-conscious silhouettes embellished with sequins and reptile-look prints. "They were all amazing artists," said Santanen. "But they were all overwhelmed by their personalities."

— Emilie Marsh

Show Calendar

Following is the schedule for the fall ready-to-wear shows, running Feb. 23 to March 2. Information is accurate as of press time, but attendees are encouraged to confirm times and locations.

Saturday, Feb. 23

4:30 p.m.: Impasse de la Défense, Restaurant Le Train Bleu, Salle Dorée, Gare de Lyon, 12th
5:30 p.m.: Fatima Lopes, Hôtel Westin, Salon Concorde, 3 Rue de Castiglione, 1st
6:30 p.m.: Dévastée, L'Académie, 14 Rue Royale, 8th
7:30 p.m.: Ivanahelsinki, Hôtel Westin, Salon Concorde, 3 Rue de Castiglione, 1st

Sunday, Feb. 24

10 a.m.: Jefen, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Gabriel, 1st
11 a.m.: Lie Sang Bong, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Soufflot, 1st
Noon: Cher Michel Klein, Le Grand Intercontinental Paris, 2 Rue Scribe, 9th
2 p.m.: Rajesh Pratap Singh, Espace Communes, 17 Rue Communes, 3rd
3 p.m.: Balmain, Hôtel Westin, 3 Rue de Castiglione, 1st
4 p.m.: Bruno Pieters, Galerie Nikki Diana Marquardt, 9 Place des Vosges, 4th
4:30 p.m.: Zien, 57 Avenue Montaigne, 8th
5 p.m.: Manish Arora BETC EURO RSCG, 85 Rue du Faubourg Saint Martin, 10th
6 p.m.: Rick Owens, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Salle Melpomène, 13 Quai Malaquais, 6th
7 p.m.: Bless, 22 Avenue Marx Dormoy, 18th
7:30 p.m.: Peachoo + Krejberg, Hôtel de Brossier, 12 Rue Charlot, 3rd
8 p.m.: AF Vandevorst, Maison des Métallos, 94 Rue Jean-Pierre Timbaud, 11th

Monday, Feb. 25

10 a.m.: Atsuro Tayama, Salle Pleyel, 252 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, 8th
11 a.m.: Véronique Leroy, Espace Pierre Cardin, 1/3 Avenue Gabriel, 8th
Noon: Gaspard Yurkievich, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Soufflot, 1st
1 p.m.: Robert Normand, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Gabriel, 1st
2 p.m.: Fashion Institute Arnhem, Les Arts Décoratifs, 103 Rue de Rivoli, 1st
2:30 p.m.: Christian Dior, Espace Éphémère Tuileries, Jardin des Tuileries, 1st
3:30 p.m.: Isabel Marant, Espace Eiffel, Quai Branly, 7th
4:30 p.m.: Sharon Wauchob, Palais de Tokyo, 13 Avenue du Président Wilson, 16th
5:30 p.m.: Undercover, La Cigale, 120 Boulevard Rochechouart, 18th
6:30 p.m.: Maison Martin Margiela, Palais Omnisports de Paris Bercy, Salle Marcel Cerdan, Porte 28, 8 Boulevard de Bercy, 12th
7:30 p.m.: Vivienne Westwood, Hôtel Westin, 3 Rue de Castiglione, 1st
8:30 p.m.: Yohji Yamamoto, Palais de la Bourse, Place de la Bourse, 2nd
9:30 p.m.: Jeremy Scott, Palais de Tokyo, 13 Avenue du Président Wilson, 16th

Tuesday, Feb. 26

9:30 a.m.: Balenciaga, 15 Rue Cassette, 6th
10:30 a.m.: Junya Watanabe, Salle Melpomène, ENS des Beaux Arts, 6th
11 a.m.: Gai Mattioli, Hôtel Westin, Salon Imperial, 3 Rue de Castiglione, 1st
11:30 a.m.: Tsumori Chisato, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Delorme
12:30 p.m.: Marithé & François Girbaud, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Le Nôtre, 1st
1 p.m.: Tao Comme des Garçons, Salle Melpomène, ENS des Beaux Arts, 8th
1:30 p.m.: Lutz, Espace Pierre Cardin, 1/3 Avenue Gabriel, Paris, 8th
2:30 p.m.: Viktor & Rolf, Carreau du Temple, 3 Rue Dupetit Thouars, 3rd
3:30 p.m.: Issey Miyake, Musée de l'Homme, 17 Place du Trocadéro, 16th
4:30 p.m.: Ann Demeulemeester, Couvent des Cordeliers, 15 Rue de l'École de Médecine, 6th
5:30 p.m.: Comme des Garçons, Salle Pleyel, 252, Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, 8th
7 p.m.: Jean-Paul Gaultier, 325 Rue Saint-Martin, 3rd
7 p.m.: Junko Maeda, Hôtel Meurice, Salon Pompadour, 228 Rue de Rivoli, 1st
8 p.m.: Véronique Branquinho, Maison des Métallos, 94 Rue Jean-Pierre Timbaud, 11th
9 p.m.: Loewe, Opéra Comique, Place Boieldieu, 2nd

Wednesday, Feb. 27

10 a.m.: Karl Lagerfeld, Espace Eiffel, Quai Branly, 7th
11 a.m.: Andrew Gn, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Gabriel, 1st
Noon: Akris, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Delorme, 1st
1 p.m.: Emanuel Ungaro, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Le Nôtre, 1st
2 p.m.: Costume National, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Soufflot, 1st

3 p.m.: Dries Van Noten, Manège du Grand Palais, Entrée Porte C, Avenue Franklin Roosevelt, 8th
4 p.m.: Christian Lacroix, Espace Éphémère Tuileries, Jardin des Tuileries, 1st
5 p.m.: Requiem, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Gabriel, 1st
6 p.m.: Givenchy, Carreau du Temple, 3 Rue Dupetit Thouars, 3rd
8 p.m.: Hussein Chalayan, see invitation
8:30 p.m.: Bernhard Willhelm, Maison des Métallos, 94 Rue Jean-Pierre Timbaud, 11th
9 p.m.: Christophe Guillarmé, Balajo, 9 Rue de Lappe, 11th

Thursday, Feb. 28

9:30 a.m.: Stella McCartney, Carreau du Temple, 3 Rue Dupetit Thouars, 3rd
10:30 a.m.: Valentino, Palais de Chaillot, 1 Place du Trocadéro, 16th
11 a.m.: Fabrizio Capriata, Hôtel de Crillon, 10 Place de la Concorde, 8th
11:30 a.m.: Léonard, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Delorme, 1st
12:30 p.m.: Barbara Bui, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Le Nôtre, 1st
1:30 p.m.: Anne Valérie Hash, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Soufflot, 1st
2:30 p.m.: Giambattista Valli, Espace Eiffel, Quai Branly, 7th
3:30 p.m.: Zucca, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Salle Melpomène, 13 Quai Malaquais, 6th
4:30 p.m.: Céline, Espace Éphémère Tuileries, Jardin des Tuileries, 1st
5:30 p.m.: Haider Ackermann, Couvent des Cordeliers, 15 Rue de l'École de Médecine, 6th
6:30 p.m.: Sophia Kokosalaki, Palais de Tokyo, 13 Avenue du Président Wilson, 16th
7 p.m.: Talbot Runhof, Palais Beaulieu, 78 Rue de Lille, 7th
8 p.m.: Yves Saint Laurent, Grand Palais, Avenue Winston Churchill, 8th

Friday, Feb. 29

10:30 a.m.: Chanel, Grand Palais, Avenue du Général Eisenhower, 8th
11:30 a.m.: Agnes B., Palais de Tokyo, 13 Avenue du Président Wilson, 16th
12:30 p.m.: Jean-Charles De Castelbajac, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Delorme, 1st
1:30 p.m.: Alena Akhmadullina, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Soufflot, 1st
2:30 p.m.: Sonia Rykiel, Espace Éphémère Tuileries, Jardin des Tuileries, 1st
3:30 p.m.: Junko Shimada, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Salle Melpomène, 13 Quai Malaquais, 6th
4:30 p.m.: Rue Du Mail (by Martine Sitbon), Couvent des Cordeliers, 15 Rue de l'École de Médecine, 6th
5:30 p.m.: Es Orchestres, La Sorbonne, 47 Rue des Ecoles, 5th
7 p.m.: Jose Castro, Parking du Palais Omnisports de Paris Bercy, 8 Boulevard de Bercy, 12th
8 p.m.: Alexander McQueen, Palais Omnisports de Paris Bercy, Salle Marcel Cerdan, Porte 28, 8 Boulevard de Bercy, 12th

Saturday, March 1

10:30 a.m.: Kenzo, Carreau du Temple, 3 Rue Dupetit Thouars, 3rd
11:30 a.m.: Elie Saab, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Delorme, 1st
Noon: Antonio Berardi, Palais de Tokyo, 13 Avenue du Président Wilson, 16th
12:30 p.m.: Wunderkind, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Soufflot, 1st
1:30 p.m.: Paul & Joe, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Le Nôtre, 1st
2:30 p.m.: Commuun, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Gabriel, 1st
3:30 p.m.: Chloé, Espace Éphémère Tuileries, Jardin des Tuileries, 1st
4:30 p.m.: Martin Grant, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Salle Melpomène, 13 Quai Malaquais, 6th
5:30 p.m.: Hermès, Espace Eiffel, Quai Branly, 7th
6:30 p.m.: Limi Feu, Couvent des Cordeliers, 15 Rue de l'École de Médecine, 6th
7 p.m.: Jasmin Santanen, Elysée Biarritz, 22 Rue Quentin Bauchart, 8th
8 p.m.: John Galiano, Grande Halle de la Villette, 211 Avenue Jean Jaurès, 19th

Sunday, March 2

10 a.m.: Vanessa Bruno, 8 Rue de la Pierre Levée, 11th
11 a.m.: Nina Ricci, Espace Éphémère Tuileries, Jardin des Tuileries, 1st
Noon: Chapurin, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Delorme, 1st
1 p.m.: Yuki Torii, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Gabriel, 1st
2 p.m.: Collette Dinnigan, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Soufflot, 1st
3 p.m.: Louis Vuitton, see invitation
4:30 p.m.: Sakina M'sa, Le Carrousel du Louvre, Salle Gabriel, 1st
5:30 p.m.: Lanvin, Espace Eiffel, Quai Branly, 7th
6:30 p.m.: Moon Young Hee, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Salle Melpomène, 13 Quai Malaquais, 6th
7:30 p.m.: Miu Miu, see invitation
8:30 p.m.: Chado Ralph Rucci, Couvent des Cordeliers, 15 Rue de l'École de Médecine, 6th



TWO LOCATIONS

1

tuileries

2

castiglione

TERRASSE DES FEUILLANTS
JARDIN DES TUILERIES
P A R I S 1 E R

THE WESTIN PARIS
3, RUE DE CASTIGLIONE
P A R I S 1 E R



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The Sun Rises on Japan's Second City

By Amanda Kaiser

THE TWO-AND-A-HALF-HOUR RIDE INTO DOWNTOWN OSAKA FROM THE bullet train station north of the city center offers little more than an anonymous skyline of high-rise buildings. Then the giant red Ferris wheel atop the HEP Five department store comes into view.

No wonder citizens here, whether they be teen girls strolling the shopping streets or city officials beaming with civic pride, are quick to point out their hometown is far from ordinary.

Many in the fashion industry know relatively little about Osaka, which is Japan's second-largest retail market after Tokyo and third-biggest city in population, behind Yokohama. But within Japan, Osaka residents enjoy quite a reputation for their gregarious, fun-loving nature and cheekily irreverent streak. The city is famous for churning out some of Japan's top comedians, and, true to local insistence to do things their own way, citizens here ride escalators on the right side, unlike Tokyoites, who veer left.

It's an interesting and important time to examine the city, as Osaka embarks on some heavy lifting to jump-start its economy, lure foreign investment and emerge from recent political scandals and turmoil in its public finances. The city, one of the biggest casualties of Japan's late Nineties bubble burst, has an ambitious roster of construction projects and revitalization schemes under way, including the \$8.3 billion development of a 59-acre rail yard into a sprawling complex of residences, offices, shops and hotels, which city officials expect to generate tens of thousands of jobs. A new Mitsukoshi department store and St. Regis hotel are also on tap.

"There has rarely been so much development work going on in Osaka, even in the boom of the bubble period," asserted Alex Stewart, president of investment promotion company Alexander Capital Access Co. Ltd. and an adviser to the city of Osaka for five years. "But this is not a construction bubble. Osaka, especially by comparison with Tokyo, had become tired looking. Most of the office and commercial building stock was outdated. It needed a major overhaul."

Once a prime manufacturing hub for Japan — the city boasts a variety of impressive achievements from having invented Cup Noodles ramen to producing the first television set in Japan — Osaka has been shifting its economic focus to areas such as robotics, biotechnology and IT services. Traditional industry still plays a significant role in the region, and electronic giants Matsushita Electric Industrial Co. Ltd., Panasonic's parent company, and rival Sharp Corp. both recently announced plans to open new flat-screen television factories in the Osaka bay area.

Osaka also touts the strategic importance of its proximity and trade links to other Asian countries, which helped the city and surrounding Kansai region emerge from the late Nineties recession.

"Exports from the Kansai area have been increasing over the past five years, supporting the local economy when local demand was weak," said Takumi Hirai, senior researcher with the Osaka Prefectural Government's Institute for Advanced Industry Development.

Undoubtedly, recent dramatic changes in local government also will factor significantly into Osaka's future. Late last month, lawyer and television personality Toru Hashimoto won the race for Osaka governor by a landslide. The 38-year-old, the youngest of the nation's 47 governors, replaced Fusae Ohta, whose term was marred by her entanglement in a series of financial scandals. Hashimoto has said he will use the local government's checkbook sparingly, given the prefectural government's grave financial crisis and debt pile, a reported 5 trillion yen, or \$46.23 billion at current exchange.

"Osaka is facing bankruptcy. Funding for all prefectural projects and public facilities will be reviewed with an eye toward cutting those that are not necessary," Hashimoto told reporters earlier this month, according to The Japan Times.

Hashimoto has not outlined his political agenda, but expectations are high. "People are expecting him to make a new Osaka," said Kana Uemura, an employee at a local advertising agency, summing up the local mood.

Japan's consumer spending, though stagnant for several years, is still extremely significant in terms of sheer bulk, and cities like Osaka are major trade centers. According to the Japan Department Stores Association, Osaka was the second-biggest city after Tokyo in terms of 2006 sales, accounting for 12.6 percent of the 7.77 trillion yen, or \$71.17 billion, total. Its market is more than double the size of the next biggest city, Nagoya, which generated 6 percent.

There are lingering concerns about the health of the Osaka economy, and that of Japan in general, in the wake of rising oil prices and fears of a global economic slowdown. Large-scale retailers in Osaka saw October sales slip 2.1 percent, steeper than the 1.8 percent drop posted nationally, according to figures from the Osaka Prefectural Government.

But the questionable climate is not deterring retailers and luxury brands from flocking to the region. Earlier this month, Hankyu opened its new men's building, which contains a host of designer labels and a Tiffany & Co. boutique. That new addition solidifies the department store's dominance in the northern neighborhood of Umeda near the main Osaka train station, and the area is also home to its women's store and youth-oriented emporium, HEP Five.

The southern part of the city also is buzzing with new retail developments. Last year, Hermès, Dolce & Gabbana and Harry Winston opened large flagships on the stately, tree-lined Mido-Suji boulevard, joining the ranks of Dior, Chanel and Giorgio Armani. Earlier this month, department store Hankyu opened its first men's wear building, which houses a Tiffany & Co. boutique as well as Tom Ford's first store in Asia.

"Osaka is a key market for all fashion and luxury brands doing business in Japan," said Cristiana Ruella, Dolce & Gabbana's managing director. "In terms of business, Osaka represents for both of our brands [Dolce & Gabbana and D&G] more than 20 percent of our sales in Japan, and the growth trend has been very positive in recent years."

Stewart noted that Osaka has come a long way since local department store Sogo collapsed into bankruptcy and closed its flagship on Mido-Suji in 2000, casting a large shadow over the city's retail industry. Sogo has since recapitalized under new ownership and opened a 14-story store on its original site.

"The thing about the Japanese, especially post-Eighties bubble economy, is that they tend to be pessimistic and cautious, but use your eyes and you can see that, at least in downtown Osaka, people are spending and the economy is buoyant," Stewart said.

Yasuhiro Sasaki, creative director for Japanese specialty retailer Tomorrowland, noted significant growth opportunities in Osaka for the high and low ends of the retail spectrum. Accustomed to living in Tokyo's shadow, people from Osaka still are very brand-conscious and eager to impress. But they are also acutely aware of the price-to-quality ratio, he said, drawing a parallel to the city's acclaimed culinary tradition of street food like okonomiyaki pancakes and fried octopus dumplings.

"Their food is very delicious, but also very cheap," he said. "H&M might have a hard time when it opens in Tokyo later this year, but it might get better results if it opens in Osaka."

Osaka Castle and Osaka at night.

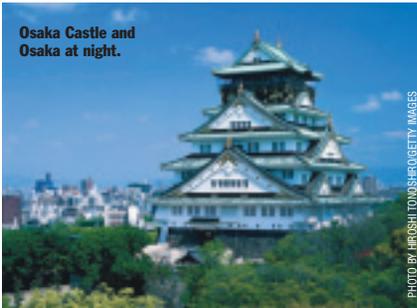


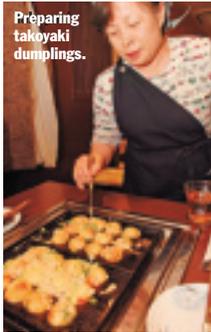
PHOTO BY HIROSHI TONISHIRO/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO BY YOSHITSUBU INISHIKAWA/GETTY IMAGES

HOT SPOTS

A Taste of Osaka

Osaka's signature dish is takoyaki, octopus dumplings fried in a cast-iron skillet. They are a symbol of the city and visitors can barely travel more than a few yards without finding a stand selling the golf ball-size morsels drizzled with a sweet brown sauce and mayonnaise. Local eateries offer the do-it-yourself experience, where an indented griddle sits in the middle of the table and diners twirl the batter with an ice pick-like device to make their own dumplings. It's a tricky skill for the uninitiated, but luckily restaurant staff are eager to help. Another local delicacy is okonomiyaki, often compared to a pancake or omelet. A batter of flour, grated yam, eggs and shredded cabbage is used as a base, then any or all ingredients can be tossed in, including beef, pork, shrimp, vegetables, bacon, green onion and cheese. Okonomiyaki, like takoyaki, is sold in both street stalls and restaurants, where diners can flip their own customized versions on a skillet.



Preparing takoyaki dumplings.

phones. While the area's name is a bit of a misnomer for such an intrinsically Japanese neighborhood, some local aspects conjure up a foreign mystique, such as the graffiti-adorned walls and random English phrases in store names like We Go. Small boutiques lining streets stock a vast and eclectic mix, from lacy frocks to vintage jeans and limited edition sneakers.

Dining in a Distant Planet

The Planet 3rd cafe is one of the busiest around on weekends and a prime spot to check out Osaka's hippest locals and expats. It's a tough spot to miss thanks to the old refrigerator out front stocked with flyers on local music and club events. Inside there's a retro feel, offering a mix of both comfort food and fusion cuisine. The menu changes frequently, but includes a range of pastas, curries and seafood dishes such as fried squid and Japanese radish with miso sauce and tuna with steamed vegetables. Outside mealtimes, it's a cozy spot for dodging a rainstorm by sipping a chai or coffee and leafing through the well-thumbed copies of Japanese versions of Vogue, Dazed & Confused and Nylon.

Where It's Hot to Shop

The name Elttob Tep hardly rolls off the tongue (it's Pet Bottle spelled backwards), but it's worth visiting the Shinsaibashi shopping district to check out the unique retail concept from Issey Miyake. The store, opened last

year in a large industrial space, is the only one of its kind in the world, stocking the house's brands including Issey Miyake, Issey Miyake Fete, Pleatsplease Issey Miyake and diffusion line Me, as well as creations from a rotating roster of emerging designers. The current lineup includes conceptual Japanese label Matohu and handbag craftsman Hikaru Matsumura. Fragrances, watches and CDs are also offered. Miyake's signature pleated dresses, embroidered jeans and even display shelves hang from the ceiling, creating an ethereal feel. Taku Satoh, who designed the store, added one terrestrial touch: a rusty Ducati motorcycle parked outside one of the dressing rooms.

Getting in the Swim of Style

The Osaka branch of Japanese retailer Aquagirl boasts a girly vibe and intriguing selection of designer merchandise. Its well-stocked displays offer frilly tops from See By Chloé, espadrilles from Christian Louboutin, dresses from 3.1 Phillip Lim and gold Puma sneakers by Mihara Yasuhiro. A canopy bed and crystal chandeliers ramp up the sophisticated feel of the store, and Aquagirl offers a glimpse of ultrafeminine looks many Osaka women favor these days. It also provides a markedly upscale contrast to cheaper fare in nearby Amerikamura. The store is nestled in the trendy side streets of Minami Semba, an area sporting cafes, art galleries, record shops and clothing boutiques.

They've All Come to Look for Amerika

Ripped fishnet stockings, Technicolor hairstyles and Little Bo Peep wannabes abound in the lively neighborhood Amerikamura, or "Amerika Town," the heart of Osaka's youth fashion scene and western Japan's answer to Tokyo's popular Harajuku district. There's nothing understated about the region, comprising the backstreets off luxury shopping strip Mid-suji. A miniature Statue of Liberty and giant clown's head preside over the scene as hip-hop music pulses through the streets. Young people of all persuasions, be they Goths, punks or bohemians, congregate in a triangular park to snack on takoyaki, chat with friends or text-message on cell



Elttob Tep

VITAL STATISTICS

POPULATION: 2.6 million

Among Osaka's largest companies are Takeda Pharmaceutical Co. Ltd.; Osaka Gas Co. Ltd.; adhesive tape maker Nitto Denko Corp.; Sharp Corp. and Matsushita Electric Industrial Co., Panasonic's parent.

UNEMPLOYMENT: 4.6 percent in the Kinki area around Osaka, in October 2007, compared with 4 percent for all of Japan.

OFFICE VACANCY RATE IN OSAKA CITY: 5.5 percent (November 2007)

NUMBER OF BUSINESSES: 201,457 (2006)

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES IN THE CITY: 2.1 million (2006)

Osaka is located two-and-a-half hours west of Tokyo by bullet train.

SOURCES: OSAKA MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT, OSAKA PREFECTURE GOVERNMENT, CITY OF OSAKA

ONLY IN OSAKA

Young women in Osaka certainly don't lack for originality. With multicolored hair and must-have boots, they sport styles that cover the Japanese fashion gamut — from sweet schoolgirl Lolita looks to Goth.



They Are Wearing®

The WWD List

Oscar's Favorites

This year's best actress and supporting actress Academy Awards nominees ranked by their overall appeal.

Sunday looks to be an interesting race for the Academy Awards' ladies, with a mix of legendary names and relative newcomers nominated in the best actress and supporting actress categories. Los Angeles-based E-Poll Market Research has ranked the nominated actresses by their overall appeal. The firm asked 1,100 men and women whether they were aware of the actress and, if they were, then asked them to state if she was appealing. Gerry Philpott, president and chief executive of the firm, pointed out that much of each actress' appeal is actually reflected in their films and their roles. "People really liked Ellen Page's role, they think she is accessible as a person, someone who seemed very real to them." Still, he noted appeal percentages are reasonably high for all the nominees. "These women are all likable actresses, even those who may not be as well-known." — Cecily Hall

BEST ACTRESS IN A LEADING ROLE

1



ELLEN PAGE, "JUNO"

Overall appeal: 70 percent

She's the "It" girl of the moment thanks to her starring role of pregnant teen Juno MacGuff in "Juno," and 20-year-old Page is taking it all in stride. Up next: Page will appear on Barbara Walters' annual Oscar night special, will be the host for the March 1 episode of "Saturday Night Live" and will be seen in theaters alongside Dennis Quaid and Sarah Jessica Parker in "Smart People," opening April 11. For the Screen Actors Guild Awards in Los Angeles in January, stylist Samantha McMillen dressed Page in a little black dress from Zac Posen, Manolo Blahnik shoes and a bag from Anya Hindmarch.

2



LAURA LINNEY, "THE SAVAGES"

Overall appeal: 55 percent

Linney gained stardom as an overwrought sister in "You Can Count on Me" in 2000, and stole plenty of scenes as Annabeth Markum, Sean Penn's character's devoted wife, in Clint Eastwood's "Mystic River" (2003). In "The Savages," she stars as neurotic playwright Wendy Savage, who battles with her brother (played by Philip Seymour Hoffman) as they guide their father through his final months. On the red carpet, the 44-year-old has donned gowns in recent awards seasons from designers such as J.Mendel, Prada, Valentino and Vera Wang. Next up for Linney: "The Other Man," in which she plays a wife suspected of adultery.

3



CATE BLANCHETT, "ELIZABETH: THE GOLDEN AGE"

Overall appeal: 54 percent

The Oscar winner and five-time nominee has attended her fair share of awards ceremonies over the past several years. She's now the first woman in Oscar history to be nominated twice for playing the same role, having been tapped for her original performance as Queen Elizabeth I in 1998's "Elizabeth." In addition, the actress picked up the Oscar in 2005 for her role as Katherine Hepburn in "The Aviator" and another nomination for her work in 2006's "Notes on a Scandal." The 38-year-old Aussie aligns herself often with Giorgio Armani these days, but her choice of designers in the past has included Givenchy, Rodarte, Valentino, Versace, Alexander McQueen and Yves Saint Laurent. In January, the pregnant mother of two wore a floral Balenciaga gown to the SAG Awards.

4



MARION COTILLARD, "LA VIE EN ROSE"

Overall appeal: 47 percent

This 32-year-old French actress' awareness has certainly been on the rise thanks to her British Academy of Film and Television Arts- and Golden Globe-winning performance as Edith Piaf in "La Vie en Rose." Prior to this, she was seen in Tim Burton's film "Big Fish," opposite Billy Crudup and Albert Finney, along with 2004's "A Very Long Engagement," which also starred Audrey Tatou. WWD reported in January, "Best actress nominee Marion Cotillard, who doesn't work with a stylist, has worn her fair share of Chanel, a house known for locking down actresses early in the game. But she was in Nina Ricci at the recent Critics' Choice Awards here and wore Giorgio Armani to the European Film Awards in Berlin."

5



JULIE CHRISTIE, "AWAY FROM HER"

Overall appeal: 45 percent

Considering the fact the legendary Julie Christie's last major role was in "Afterglow" in 1997, it's impressive to see her name once again on Oscar's list. For "Away From Her," Christie took on the role of Fiona Anderson, a beautiful, married woman in her early 60s who is placed in a nursing home after becoming consumed by Alzheimer's Disease. It remains to be seen what the 66-year-old will wear on Sunday. WWD said in January, "Julie Christie, another best actress nominee who dresses herself, is a bit of an enigma because she hasn't been a red-carpet regular of late, but she looked elegant and timeless at the National Board of Review Awards in Manhattan."

BEST ACTRESS IN A SUPPORTING ROLE

1



RUBY DEE, "AMERICAN GANGSTER"

Overall appeal: 64 percent

Mama Lucas will surely go down as one of the most noteworthy supporting characters in film for 2007. Actress Ruby Dee portrays the real-life loving mother of heroin kingpin Frank Lucas, who smuggled drugs into the country from the Far East in the Seventies — and won a SAG Award for her performance. Dee stars alongside Hollywood heavyweights such as Russell Crowe and Denzel Washington, who directed the film. She has appeared in classic films such as "A Raisin in the Sun" (1961) and "Do the Right Thing" (1988).

2



CATE BLANCHETT, "I'M NOT THERE"

Overall appeal: 54 percent

Blanchett is only the 11th actor to have received dual nominations — previous double nominees include Julianne Moore, Emma Thompson, Holly Hunter and Sigourney Weaver. In "I'm Not There," Blanchett plays the role of Jude, a Bob Dylan-like artist whose interests in new musical styles alienates many of his devoted fans during a concert tour. WWD reported earlier this month that the pregnant Blanchett is in preproduction on "The Fantastic Mr. Fox" (2009), and in postproduction on "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" and "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull," both due out later this year. After that, she told WWD, she'll take a break. "I'm not returning to acting until 2009, when I'm back on stage at the Sydney Theatre Company. We're doing a Shakespeare cycle, which should be fantastic."

3



TILDA SWINTON, "MICHAEL CLAYTON"

Overall appeal: 48 percent

The London born and bred Swinton began her acting career on stage, having worked with the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh and the Royal Shakespeare Company before she decided to pursue a career in film. Her performance as Karen Crowder in "Michael Clayton" has received numerous accolades, winning her the BAFTA Award for Supporting Actress earlier this month. The 47-year-old wore a Dior dress adorned with jet-black feathers on the red carpet that evening. She has also worn designs from the likes of Prada and Jil Sander to recent events.

4



AMY RYAN, "GONE BABY GONE"

Overall appeal: 43 percent

Prior to her role in Ben Affleck's directorial debut, "Gone Baby Gone," Amy Ryan had spent most of her career on the stage — her résumé also boasts some TV work and smaller film roles, like that of Chris Cooper's starstruck wife in "Capote." But Ryan struck the big time with this film. In it, she plays the parent of a missing four-year-old girl. Her character is also a drug user whose own behaviors contributed to her daughter's disappearance. For the Oscars, WWD reported that the 37-year-old will be working with stylist Annabel Tollman, "who has dressed Scarlett Johansson for the Oscars and is known for adventurous choices that show off her clients' best attributes."

5



SAOIRSE RONAN, "ATONEMENT"

Overall appeal: 41 percent

In the Oscar-nominated film "Atonement," Saoirse Ronan plays 13-year-old Briony Tallis, a precocious and naïve aspiring writer whose misunderstanding of her older sister's actions leads to a series of life-changing, tragic events. The role was young Ronan's big break, and next she will star in "City of Ember" this year alongside Bill Murray, and will be seen in "The Lovely Bones" next year — she plays the leading role of Susie Salmon, a murdered girl who helps her family from heaven. The movie also stars Rachel Weisz, Mark Wahlberg and Susan Sarandon.

Denim Report

Jones Puts L.E.I. Fate in Wal-Mart's Hands

By Ross Tucker

NEW YORK — Jones Apparel Group's efforts to revitalize L.E.I. have included changes in management and operations and a major overhaul of the brand's image, all of which have been unable to stem nearly five years of declining sales.

Now in a move drawing praise from Wall Street and skepticism from the industry, Jones is casting what's left of L.E.I.'s fortunes exclusively with Wal-Mart, the world's largest retailer.

Jones revealed it's decision to move L.E.I. into Wal-Mart for the back-to-school season in conjunction with its release of year-end financial results on Feb. 13. Narrower losses for the quarter, coupled with the L.E.I. news, helped push the vendor's shares up 7.2 percent to close at \$17.15 a share for the day. On Wednesday, Jones' shares closed at \$14.99.

task of turning around the brand fell to Jack Gross when he became ceo of Jones' denim and junior segments in January 2006. Gross brought L.E.I. more formally into Jones' operations, but a difficult juniors retail environment continued to hamper sales.

Jones made a full-fledged effort to right the ship for the 2007 b-t-s season, overhauling the brand with new packaging, labeling, advertising and a strategy to increase the brand's Internet presence. To reconnect with the 13- to 17-year-old target audience, the brand veered away from a mature image and adopted a more playful, tongue-in-cheek attitude that included caricatures of girls with star shapes on their faces and American flag-like tongues sticking out.

Gross told WWD at the time that the response to the revamped line among retailers had been "outstanding," but admitted that turning things around would likely be a gradual process. Those efforts haven't panned out,

lieve the junior customer is not 13 to 17, it's 13 to 24 or 25 years old. We enhanced the branding to encompass the broader age group of the junior consumer."

Financial analysts favored the Wal-Mart deal based on the sizeable upside potential.

"This opens up a whole new wave of growth for a company that many of us believe has top-line challenges," said Brad Stephens, a retail analyst for Morgan Keegan & Co. Inc.

Stephens noted there were few opportunities for L.E.I. to grow in its current department store positioning, whereas being in Wal-Mart could help the brand grow into more product categories and, further down the road, expand into Wal-Mart stores in Canada and Mexico. Stephens said the brand now had the opportunity to develop into a \$300 million business.

Eric Beder, retail analyst at Brean Murray, Carret & Co., said Wal-Mart's aggressiveness in bringing in branded apparel to its stores has helped its performance and could do the same for Jones.

"If you're going to do it, you've got to go whole hog," said Beder. "If you fully commit to the chain, it can be very lucrative."

At Wal-Mart, L.E.I. will go up against brands such as VF Corp.-owned Riders, Levi Strauss Signature and No Boundaries. The story of the Signature brand in particular serves as an example of the types of problems L.E.I. could potentially encounter: Levi's introduced the Signature brand in 2002 in a bid to tap into the mass channel market. Moving into both Wal-Mart and Target resulted in sales skyrocketing to \$364.6 million by 2005. Then, in 2006, Wal-Mart opted to devote more shelf space to its private label brands and Signature revenues immediately dropped off. Signature revenues fell 13.1 percent in 2006 to \$316.8 million and have continued to fall throughout 2007 and into this year.

Gross believes L.E.I. will enter Wal-Mart at an appropriate price point, likely under \$20 at retail, to be a success. "I believe L.E.I. can be a backbone brand for Wal-Mart for b-t-s of 2008 and beyond," he said.

Robert Passikoff, president of Brand Keys, a customer loyalty research consultancy, believes that whether a brand succeeds at Wal-Mart depends heavily on the values of the brand. "The issue is that there are going to be certain brands that will absolutely thrive in an environment like Wal-Mart," said Passikoff. "Then there are others whose values are not going to be reinforced there."

Passikoff questioned whether the "life, energy, intelligence" message would translate at Wal-Mart. He also isn't convinced the brand will carry any name recognition among consumers.

Dick Gilbert, who founded Mudd, said L.E.I. wasn't the only junior denim brand to experience the pains of the market over the last several years. The brand may have peaked, a problem that was further complicated by the rise of the premium segment.

"I think what happened is premium got strong and then the subpremium, that \$80 to \$100 zone, came along," said Gilbert. "The kids are spending more money on their jeans right now."



A 2007 ad, left, shows Jones' effort to give L.E.I. a youthful and playful image. Ads from 2005 and 2004, center and right, sought a more mature brand representation.

"We are enthusiastic about expanding our existing relationship with Wal-Mart and bringing this dynamic junior lifestyle brand to a broader audience," Wesley Card, Jones' president and chief executive officer, said at the time.

The brand's dynamism, however, has been on the wane since being acquired by Jones. The company acquired L.E.I. — which stands for life, energy and intelligence — in 2002 in a deal worth \$385 million. L.E.I. had established itself as a dominant junior brand, and at that time, was generating sales of \$248 million. The brand's primary competitors were Mudd and Paris Blues.

Jones initially allowed the brand to operate as an independent division with its own staff and sales force, a decision that management later acknowledged was a mistake. Sales began to slide as a result of operational inefficiencies that were complicated by increased competition. The

and industry and Wall Street sources estimate L.E.I.'s annual sales have fallen to as low as \$70 million.

In an interview on Wednesday, Gross said the idea of changing channels for L.E.I. came about after a review he conducted seven months ago of the business strategy for the denim and junior segments.

"The rebranding [of L.E.I.] went very well and the acceptance of the retailers was very good," said Gross. "However, in reviewing the brands we had, I felt we were overbranded for the same consumer segment."

He pointed out that the L.E.I. and Glo brands were competing for the same dwindling junior space. Gross also said Jones' rebranding effort last year for L.E.I. had skewed too far toward the juvenile, and his view of the segment and how Jones will market to it has changed.

"The branding that we had in the national chain channel went a little too youthful," said Gross. "I be-

Prps Finally Ready for Women's

DONWAN HARRELL WASN'T COMMITTED TO THE WOMEN'S MARKET, UNTIL NOW.

"I've always been apprehensive about doing women's, since it's such a fickle market," said Harrell, who started the premium jeans brand, Prps, shorthand for Purpose, more than three years ago. "Now that we have been around for a while, a lot of our stores have been asking for it, so this seems like a safe time to get into it."

The women's collection, launching for fall, is made up primarily of denim jeans with three styles: the Daytona, a slim boot cut; the Dart, with a superslim leg, and the Firebird, a straight-leg style. Each is available in a variety of washes and treatments that Harrell said are inspired by his love of vintage cars.

"When I was a kid growing up in North Carolina, I always used to hang out at the drag strips and I have my own collection of vintage cars [Harrell owns about 15], so I love that rough, worn-in look that I used to see at the strip," he said, showing off a photo of his Dodge Dart on his cell phone.

There are what look like rust stains and oil spots marked on some of the washes on the jeans, just one of the special elements found on the product. Attention to detail can be seen throughout, from a purple detailed zipper to printed pocket linings and a hand-oiled leather label. Made of Japanese and European fabrics, the jeans are all hand-washed, finished and sewn in Japan.

But realizing that more than a denim line is needed to succeed in a tough economic period, Harrell's Prps collection for women also offers a complete range of sportswear, including flannel button-down tops, rabbit fur vests, flannel-lined cotton jackets, sweaters accented with fur trims and a range of leather jackets. The collection wholesales from \$75 for a flannel shirt to about \$600 for a leather jacket.

"I want people to see this line as a casual, functional luxury collection," Harrell said. "I want people to look at each piece and say 'I have to have that.' It's all about bringing something new to the table."

Harrell declined to give sales expectations for the women's line, but said he hopes for it to eventually be in the same mix of specialty and department stores, such as Bergdorf Goodman and Bloomingdale's, as the men's product.

— Julee Kaplan



Looks from the first Prps women's collection.

The Beat

Modern Amusement Gets Female Friendly

By Khanh T.L. Tran

SANTA MONICA, Calif. — Modern Amusement's crow logo is landing on another perch.

The jaunty men's label worn by celebrities such as Ashton Kutcher is introducing 35 styles in its first women's sportswear collection. Launching this fall, along with a handful of accessories in a single delivery scheduled for Aug. 15, the contemporary apparel line follows the bikinis and one-piece swimsuits that Modern Amusement began selling for the spring season.

The collection has been in development for two years. Modern Amusement is the latest men's wear company — others include Band of Outsiders, Trovata and Rag & Bone — branching into the potentially more lucrative women's market.

"Once you have women's with men's, it opens up opportunities," said creative director John Moore, who oversees sportswear, swim and accessories for men and women.

Modern Amusement dallied in women's wear when it was designed by founder Jeff Yokoyama but at least four years have passed since then. Yokoyama sold Modern Amusement for \$375,000 in 2004 to Mossimo Giannulli, who recruited Moore from New Albany, Ohio-based Abercrombie & Fitch to revamp the men's business from a Southern California beach-inspired line into a premium label with a global perspective. Two years later, Giannulli sold his namesake company, which included Modern Amusement, to Iconix Brand Group for \$119 million, and later bought back Modern Amusement from Iconix for \$4.8 million.

Privately held Modern Amusement declined to disclose annual sales and its first-year financial goals for the women's line. Wholesale prices for women's sportswear range from \$24 for tank tops and Ts to \$200 for sweaters and dresses. The target customer is a woman between 20 and 40 who is "old enough to have a global perspective and young enough to get away with anything," Moore said.

Certainly, a carefree attitude permeates Modern Amusement's loftlike headquarters in this beachside city. One corner of the space is decorated with a yellow surfboard, red paisley wallpaper, overstuffed armchairs and tequila bottles. Moore, who launched the surf-based Hollister label at Abercrombie, comes to work in skinny jeans and a huge tattoo peeks from under his shirt sleeve.

Inspiration for the women's sportswear and accessories spans decades, continents and media. Moore admired

not only the independent spirit of European chanteuses, including Françoise Hardy and Jane Birkin, but also the way the movie character Annie Hall wore her trousers. Photos of a polka-dot-wearing Picasso influenced some prints.

Modern Amusement also concocted a tale about a fictitious couple named Hunter ("good looks are hidden beneath his facial scruff and his somewhat disheveled layers of clothes") and Sabine (a sequin factory heiress who "is an educated and refined young woman, well-connected and extremely well-dressed"), who provide the references for the silhouettes and palette in the women's and men's lines.

High-end retailers, including Neiman Marcus and Holt Renfrew, have checked out the women's sportswear. Fred Segal Flair, which ordered the women's swimwear for spring, purchased the sportswear.

"It was boyish but had a feminine part of it," said Jeannine Braden, owner of Fred Segal Flair, a friend of Moore who offered her Santa Monica boutique as a lab to sell limited runs and special pieces from Modern Amusement. Braden said the brand can provide value to her customers, including a silk twill scoop-neck dress with layered cap sleeves retailing for \$260.

Among Modern Amusement's looks are strapless navy minidresses crafted from raw silk with ruffles in asymmetrical rows from front to back.

"Our girl's two favorite pastimes are shopping and being social," Moore said.

That's not to say that androgynous Annie Hall won't be able to find anything in the line. There are sheer tuxedo blouses in silk chiffon, sweater vests that have a knit front and a back sewn from purple and black striped silk, and wool-viscose trenchcoats. Accessories include red double-wrapped skinny leather belts with feather buckles.

Jeans are absent. "Modern Amusement has always been known as an alternative to denim," Moore said. "Over time, there will be a denim piece."



Looks from Modern Amusement's women's sportswear line launching in the fall.

Thomson's Yummie Tummie Control

By Julee Kaplan

She did it for Diddy, Jennifer Lopez and then for Beyoncé. Now Heather Thomson is doing something for herself.

After a soft launch for spring, Thomson, the former corecreative director at brands such as Sean John, JLO by Jennifer Lopez and House of Deréon, is producing her own line for fall, called Yummie Tummie.

Thomson, who eventually plans to branch out into a full mix of separates, described the line as a "modern body shaper." She came up with the idea after giving birth to her son, Alexander Jack, 3, and daughter Ella Rae, nine months, and gaining hard-to-lose pregnancy weight.

"I had some big babies," she said, noting her son was 8 pounds, 6 oz., and her daughter, 8 pounds, 8 oz. "With my first, I gained 65 pounds and with my second, I gained 68 pounds. Of course, I lost a lot of the weight, but my stomach just never seemed to get flat again."

The Yummie Tummie line wholesales from \$26 for the basic tank to \$34 for the long-sleeve or the nursing tank. Thomson, based in New York, declined to give first-year sales volume expectations.

About two years ago, Thomson was working as a co-founder and co-creative director at Beyond Productions with Tina and Beyoncé Knowles. She helped in the creation of the House of Deréon, Miss Tina and Deréon labels. In her spare time, Thomson sewed what she called her Yummie Tummies in her living room. They were tank tops made of pima cotton and a tight spandex fabric that would hold in her stomach. She made a few of them in basic colors, so she could wear them under her clothes. The response was immediate.

"People would ask if I lost weight and I would say, 'Nope, it's just my Yummie Tummie,'" she said. "This was after I literally tried everything — every body shaper on the market — and they would never fit quite right. They



Two Yummie Tummie tops.

would roll up or fall down, they were just not right for my body. I spent thousands on these things. My mother even suggested I get a girdle, which I did. When people would hug me, they would ask what I had under my clothes. It was so embarrassing."

So, after four years working with the Knowles, Thomson decided to leave and do her own collection of Yummie Tummies. She sewed 1,000 of them in her home and took them to the Fashion Coterie this month.

"For the soft launch, we only shipped to about 40 stores. For fall, we will sell [to] 400 stores," she said.

The line consists of eight tops available in 10 colors, ranging from basic black, white and ivory to pale pink, navy and bright red. There is the basic tank top, a satin-trim adjustable tank, a scoopneck long-sleeve top, a short-sleeve top and a nursing tank. All are made with pima cotton on top (which is meant to be seen under a blouse or a dress) and bottom (to hold it in place), and the middle is made of a patent-pending microdenier fabric, which holds the stomach in. They are all available in short and long models.

"The whole idea was to make a shaper that looks good, is comfortable and really works," Thomson explained. "The fabric is designed to not roll up over your belly and is made for layering over or tucking into pants or skirts. The panel will fit comfortably smooth and will naturally whisk moisture away, which makes them great for the gym. I seriously wear a Yummie Tummie every single day — my bra, my underwear, my Yummie Tummie."

Eventually, Thomson said she will add embellished necklines, new colors and prints, which she is developing. She envisions the brand slowly moving into a full range. For now, she is concentrating on pleasing her customers, including specialty retailers such as Montmartre and Precision in New York and Shop Intuition and Lisa Kline in Los Angeles.

"We cannot keep our Yummie Tummies in stock," said Jaye Hersh, owner of Shop Intuition. "The minute I saw this item, I knew it was going to be the next big thing. The buzz has already begun. The calls started coming in asking for that secret special tank they saw their friend wearing. We have a waiting list for new colors and styles. We are selling at least one to every customer that walks in the store."



The exterior of the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center.

New School Unveils Center

In what looks like an exemplary example of showcasing design to heighten public awareness, The New School dedicated the Sheila C. Johnson Design Center Wednesday.

Designed by Lyn Rice Architects, the 32,800-square-foot "urban quad" for Parsons The New School for Design provides a base for its four historic buildings on the southwest corner of Fifth Avenue and 13th Street. Lyn Rice, who was part of the team behind the popular art destination Dia:Beacon, used skylight-covered public program spaces, exhibition galleries, learning centers, a futuristic, compact auditorium and chartreuse-accented offices in his design for The New School to assure students and faculty will cross paths frequently, with the hope that spontaneity will help trigger all sorts of creative ideas and exchanges.

The building's namesake, a trustee and chair of the school's board of governors, provided a \$7 million gift, which helped make the project possible. Longtime New School supporters



The space is designed to make students and faculty mingle.

Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen and Arnold and Sheila Aronson also pitched in. Johnson, a founding partner of BET (Black Entertainment Television) and the first woman to have a stake in three professional sports teams, marveled at the finished product after four years of construction rooted out an old vaudeville theater, among other relics.

"Where we are standing used to be the garbage dump for the trash. All the rats were here," she said, shaking her head slightly with a smile.

"I loved the energy of Parsons but I felt the physical learning environment felt subservient and that made me angry," she said. "As a new trustee, I wanted to be a catalyst to get other people on board. Hopefully, the new physical space will not only attract great students but great faculty, too."

The new setup's aim is for the school's 4,000 students to collaborate regardless of their respective disciplines. Photography, product design, fashion, architecture and critical theory are among those offered. In this ever-shrinking global economy, design requires tackling some of the world's most complex issues — from sustainability to globalization, according to Tim Marshall, dean of Parsons The New School for Design.

Reminders of such weighty topics are on display in the galleries. Images of women who have overcome servitude and other serious setbacks are up in "Women Empowered: Photographic Portraiture by Phil Borges," an exhibition created with the nonprofit organization CARE. Another gallery features Andy Warhol's "Mao," two Chuck Close portraits of Bill Clinton and Karen Walker's "A Means to an End...A Shadow Drama in Five Acts" in "Soft Parade: Selected Works from The New School Collection."

Beyond the reception desk at the Fifth Avenue entrance, there is an example of how a former product design student's creation was well-received. Next to Philip O'Sullivan's bright green OverVue digital print wallpaper, a design that consists of graphic overlays and perforated-cutout patterns, is a small placard highlighting how it was featured in the competitive Salone del Mobile in Milan as well as the International Contemporary Furniture Fair.

Students and faculty at work in the Johnson Design Center will probably have their share of curious onlookers, due to full-length windows that face Fifth Avenue and East 13th Street. Passersby on Fifth can see a wall-size digital photo, a wooden model, video footage and color photos of the park pavilion built near the Catskill Mountains by 11 New School students over a 10-week stretch last year as part of a design workshop. The school's president, Bob Kerrey, noted how outside a nearby 14th Street building, pedestrians tend to stop and stare at New School students building replica boats from the 1820s that were common on the Hudson River.

"There are lots of things going on here. My hope is that this voyeuristic aspect will be a great benefit for the university," Kerrey said.

But the building is not all bells and whistles. Visitors entering on Fifth Avenue are greeted by a TV monitor that lists the time and location of all the upcoming classes that day.

— Rosemary Feitelberg

Liz Board Backs McComb

Continued from page one

"The entire board has confidence in Bill, and we are very clear on the path we've chosen," said board chair Kay Koplovitz, who is also the founder of USA Network and a principal of media investment firm Koplovitz & Co. LLC. "We know the macroeconomic environment has changed since we set the targets, but the strategy we've chosen is correct and the execution is correct. We realize we have a lot to do, that it can't be done overnight, and we are focused on meeting our targets over a three-year period."

McComb said Wednesday that the company is in a "quiet period," and therefore he is unable to comment about the board's attitude toward his performance or the company's earnings.

The former Johnson & Johnson group president has been on the job at Claiborne for about 15 months. It's been seven months since his July 11 investors meeting when he laid out the new strategy for the \$4.99 billion vendor, which included divesting more than a dozen less-profitable brands and pumping investments into power brands Juicy Couture, Lucky Brand, Kate Spade and Mexx. Since then, the company has restructured, cut costs and jobs and decided the fates of 14 of the 16 brands it put on review, including Dana Buchman and Ellen Tracy.

Koplovitz said the board's time frame is based on seeing positive results from the strategic review by 2010, a period McComb laid out in July. The board last met in January and will convene again in March.

"It's too early to reach any conclusions," said board member Raul J. Fernandez, ceo and chair of ObjectVideo Inc., who also echoed support for McComb. "These things take time. He's just begun to execute on the divestiture and restructuring. It would be like declaring a winner in the first quarter of the game."

Of course, it's not unheard of for boards to reevaluate executives early into their terms. Just this week, Dawn Robertson exited as Old Navy president after 16 months on the job. In 2006, William D. Perez stepped down as chief executive of Nike Inc. after 13 months, and Mark Weber stepped down from the top role at Phillips-Van Heusen Corp. after eight months.

Sources point to this month's exit of Paul E. Tierney Jr., who had served on Claiborne's board since 1995, as a sign that the



William L. McComb

board might not be as unified as it claims. Tierney was close with McComb's predecessor, Paul Charron, but the company said that did not play a role in his exit.

"Paul Tierney has been a valued director of Liz Claiborne Inc. since 1995 and has contributed immeasurably throughout his tenure," McComb said. "At this time, Paul has other commitments that he feels will preclude him from serving the shareholders to the best of his ability, and while we respect his decision, we are sorry to see him go."

Tierney, co-founding member of Development Capital LLC and general partner of Aperture Venture Partners LLC, serves on many nonprofit boards, including chairing TechnoServe Inc., which he invited McComb to serve on with him. Tierney declined to comment Wednesday on why he stepped down.

Even with the board's support, McComb still has to contend with shareholders in the face of an \$18.06 stock price. Wall Street sent Claiborne's stock down 18.4 percent Feb. 14 after the vendor warned that fourth-quarter and year-end earnings would miss expectations. The warning followed three consecutive quarters of 65 percent earnings declines.

"While nobody is happy with the outcome for the fiscal year, our faith in Bill remains absolutely intact," said board member Arthur C. Martinez, retired chair, president and ceo of Sears, Roebuck and Co. "If anything, the turbulent markets in the retail world make us realize how much we needed a new strategy. This company needed some dramatic things to happen to it. Strategies get tired, people get tired — we needed someone with a fresh perspective."

Martinez admitted he was disappointed in the stock price and the price the brands on review fetched, but said both were primarily the result of

the marketplace.

"Liz is not the only fashion apparel retail company going through a difficult period," said board member Bernard W. Aronson, managing partner of ACON Investments LLC. "The earnings miss was not because of errors in execution or strategy. These are broad long-term trends, and to Liz's credit, we understood these trends and adopted this strategy to deal with it."

Aronson added that he thinks the bad news is behind the company, and points to progress the company has made with Juicy Couture, restructuring, cost savings, selling off less profitable businesses and hires like Tim Gunn and Isaac Mizrahi.

"The old strategy just wasn't going to work, and we knew a change of this magnitude would take time and have ups and downs," said board member Daniel A. Carp, retired ceo and chair of Eastman Kodak Co. "While we don't like to be doing this in the face of headwinds from the economy, we are very pleased with the results. We're watching it every quarter, and as long as we continue to see good progress, we are comfortable not looking at changes in the strategy."

Brad Stephens, a retail analyst for Morgan Keegan & Co. Inc., doesn't see a light at the end of the tunnel and worries the company will miss even its adjusted earnings projection of \$1.50 to \$1.70 a share for 2008. But even Stephens argues for patience.

"Absolutely McComb needs more time," he said. "The earnings miss proves how much his strategy was right: how vulnerable the company is to whims of department stores."

Analyst Jennifer Black said she thinks the board will give McComb at least two years from his November 2006 start date, and added that the board shouldn't shake up leadership during the planning for fall and holiday. Moreover, the impact of new hires — from Deborah Lloyd at Kate Spade to Mizrahi for the Liz Claiborne brand — won't be fully seen until the spring 2009 collections.

Until then, the Claiborne board backs McComb. "I have full confidence in our ceo, Bill McComb. I have full confidence in the team he is putting together, and I have full confidence in the strategy we are now implementing," said board member Nancy J. Karch, director emeritus of McKinsey & Co. "Unfortunately, we are in tough market times."

A Night of Jazz With Brooks Bros.

The Brooks Brothers crowd got behind the scenes at Jazz at Lincoln Center on Friday during an evening of dining and schmoozing with the musicians. Cocktails and dinner were served in a recording studio, followed by a concert of Duke Ellington tunes performed by Wynton Marsalis and the jazz orchestra, and a Champagne after party.

Brooks Bros. has been offering the experience for three years, selling 50 tickets at \$475 each via its holiday catalogue. They sell out in a day. Along with the ticket holders, Brooks Bros. executives and media also show up, making for a crowd of about 100.

"Wynton Marsalis is a fan of Brooks Bros.; we support him and he supports us," said Eraldo Poletto, president of international business and strategic development of Brooks Bros. "I'm not a big expert on jazz, but I like it. Jazz and Brooks Bros. are both very much part of America."

"I'm a music buff. I listen to all kinds of music," said Lou Amendola, chief merchandising officer at Brooks Bros.

The company is a supporter of the arts, serving as the official wardrobe sponsor of Jazz at Lincoln Center since 2001, as well as staging events to benefit Jazz at Lincoln Center's education programs.



Wynton Marsalis and Eraldo Poletto

— David Moin

MEMO PAD

OUT, BUT REMAINING: Martha McCully is packing it in after almost six years as executive editor at In Style — at least, her full-time gig. She claimed Wednesday that she was giving up her desk to become a consultant to In Style so she could “pursue other opportunities” outside the Time Inc. title.

McCully said she will remain on the masthead for a while, but is looking forward to pursuing other interests in the beauty, wellness and entertainment worlds, both online and on television. “I’m excited about getting back in the beauty world, and doing more projects there,” she said. “I’ll also be writing for other magazines and doing different projects.”

In addition, McCully plans to do some travel writing and will balance her time between Los Angeles and New York. Next month, she will begin taping the third season of “Design Star,” the HGTV interior design reality show that she judges, along with Cynthia Rowley and Vern Yip. In Style hasn’t named a replacement for McCully; however, some observers saw the duties taken up by deputy managing editor Eilidh MacAskill, who is returning from maternity leave, as being similar to those of McCully’s. — **Amy Wicks**

BEAUTY ALONE: Add another title to the unlikely grab bag of magazines trumpeting their increased beauty coverage: Vanity Fair has its first-ever beauty director. SunHee Grinnell has been promoted from senior photography and beauty editor, having served in dual photo and

beauty editing roles there at various intervals since 1990. Vanity Fair editor in chief Gaydon Carter said in a statement, “Especially as we expand our coverage of the beauty industry on the Web, this is an ideal role for her.”

Asked to elaborate on what such increased beauty coverage on the Web might look like, a spokeswoman said: “Nothing has been solidified yet,” but mentioned as possibilities a more-frequently updated Web version of the magazine’s beauty page or listings of “beauty happenings” in major cities. — **Irin Carmon**

SWAPPING SPOTS: Did Lesley Rotchford miss the expansive cafeteria at Hearst Tower that much? The former Cosmopolitan features editor left the magazine eight months ago to become articles editor at Allure, but is

returning to her former stomping grounds as deputy editor. Rotchford replaces Theresa O'Rourke, who left last month to join Every Day with Rachael Ray as executive editor. Rotchford spent six-and-a-half years at Cosmo before jumping to Allure in June. She will return to her old digs Monday. — **Stephanie D. Smith**

ALL YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT DIDDY: Sean Combs didn't know that Time's “10 Questions” live event Wednesday morning would be more intense than an average meet-and-greet, but he took an hour to answer questions from Time readers on his career trajectory, the New York marathon and which of his many names would go on his headstone (Sean John Combs, if you were wondering). The event, held at Time's Midtown offices, is an expansion of the “10 Questions”

feature in the magazine and on its Web site. The magazine invited Combs to tape an interview with time.com managing editor Josh Tyranigiel in front of an audience, and the video will go up on time.com today with an edited story appearing in the Time issue out Friday. During the interview, Combs compared himself with P.T. Barnum when describing his multifaceted career as an entrepreneur, fashion designer and entertainer. He also said he gets his news from television, not newspapers, because it's hard to focus. Combs also admitted he didn't have the same hunger for news as journalists after launching and shuttering his own title, Notorious, in the late Nineties. “There could be something that happens and you all can leave me sitting here,” he said. “It's just a lot of work.” — **S.D.S.**

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The West Wing

The bash Vanity Fair cohosted with Dior on Monday night for the magazine's Hollywood Issue provided an opportunity for revelry that's been largely missing from the writers' strike-clouded run-up to the Academy Awards.

While not nearly as opulent as the magazine's legendary post-Oscar bash, which was scrapped due to the strike, the dinner — planned just six weeks in advance — was an elegant, low-key affair held at BondSt restaurant in the recently opened Thompson Hotel in Beverly Hills. And the mood was festive, with **America Ferrera**, **Ginnifer Goodwin** and **Zoe Saldana** (three of the Dior-dressed starlets on the inside of the issue's foldout cover) mingling and chatting with other guests. Unfortunately those guests didn't include the most prominent quartet of cover girls — **Emily Blunt**, **Amy Adams**, **Jessica Biel** and **Anne Hathaway**.

"I may be thin, but I have a big booty," said Saldana. "Dior is made to fit every woman's shape, and the dresses fit beautifully. True fashion is not just about expensive clothes and names, it has to be more than that, a reflection of culture."

Speaking of culture, "It's always a little awkward when someone says, 'Let's toast the Bush tragedy,'" said **Jacob Weisberg** the next night at a party **Arianna Huffington** threw for him in her Los Angeles home. But since that's the title of his new book, and since he's a pretty connected guy, that was the thing being feted.

Needless to say, lots of people were discussing the election. That morning, New York Times columnist **David Brooks** had written about "Obama Fatigue," a disorder supposedly shared by many of the Illinois senator's supporters, who may not be sure just what their candidate actually stands for: "I'm a little worried about that," admitted Slate's **Mickey Kaus** of Obama. "And I'm worried about the wife."

But Weisberg, who has interviewed the presidential hopeful, said he is experiencing nothing of the sort. "I feel the opposite way. When he speaks it's like whale mating calls."

Adrian Grenier wasn't about to give Obama an official endorsement, but he definitely seemed to be leaning his way. Asked what he was wearing, the young actor laughed and said, "Obama shorts and Obama underwear."



America Ferrera in Dior by John Galliano.



Sanaa Lathan and Zoe Saldana, both in Dior by John Galliano.



Adrian Grenier



Arianna Huffington and Jacob Weisberg



Minnie Mortimer Gaghan at Arianna Huffington's.

Jurnee Smollett in Dior by John Galliano at BondSt.



Ginnifer Goodwin in Dior by John Galliano.



Alison Lohman and Selma Blair at BondSt.

SPLIT PERSONALITY

One could be forgiven for pegging Eddie Redmayne as a straight-up period actor. The Eton- and Cambridge-educated 26-year-old had his professional debut in the Globe Theatre's production of "Twelfth Night" and has starred opposite both Helen Mirren and Cate Blanchett as Queen Elizabeth. He will next be seen in the "The Other Boleyn Girl," opening Feb. 29, in which he plays William Stafford, a steward who becomes Mary's (Scarlett Johansson) savior.

"What's hilarious is he and Mary Boleyn end up looking after Anne Boleyn's child, who was in fact Elizabeth," says Redmayne. "There was a point when 'The Other Boleyn Girl' and 'Elizabeth: The Golden Age' were going to come out at the same time and, in one, I was Elizabeth's foster father and, in the other one, I was trying to assassinate her. At that point I knew it was probably enough now with the Elizabethan stuff."

The middle son of a London banker, Redmayne read art



Scarlett Johansson and Eddie Redmayne in "The Other Boleyn Girl."

history at Cambridge before diving headfirst into an acting career. A starring role opposite

Jonathan Pryce in a 2004 London stage production of Edward Albee's "The Goat" led to his breakout part as Matt Damon's son in "The Good Shepherd." He recently wrapped "Powder Blue" with Forest Whitaker and Jessica Biel in which he plays "an L.A. mortician who has a social anxiety disorder, so when he meets women he gets asthma attacks and passes out" and this spring he appears in "Savage Grace" beside Julianne Moore.

Based on a true story, the latter has Redmayne as Tony, the troubled son of Barbara (Moore) and Brooks Baekeland, an heir to the Bakelite fortune. After Barbara and Brooks separate, Tony and his mother's relationship becomes increasingly toxic (and sexual), leading son to murder mother in London in 1972.

"It was really through circumstance that he ended up where he was, through the claustrophobia of his mother

completely clinging on to him and strangling him," explains Redmayne. "I think it's an interesting study of how money can affect you and constrict talent: Barbara was a talented actress, Brooks was a great writer and a fantastic mind and Tony had his own talents...Yet if you have that much wealth and no need or drive to do anything, it can suffocate you."

Indeed, it seems that perhaps the actor should be more concerned with an onslaught of oddball roles than period ones.

"In 'The Goat' I was playing a gay New Yorker, son of a liberal family, whose father is f-cking a goat and he gets so confused by this he ends up snogging his father. Then cut to a couple of years later and I was in Spain shooting 'Savage Grace' as another gay New Yorker, this time being seduced by his mother," sums up Redmayne. "So I was like, 'Oh there you go: symmetry! I'm getting typecast.'"

— Vanessa Lawrence



Eddie Redmayne