



New York Fashion Week: Basics, but never boring by Kim Crow/Plain Dealer Style Editor

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You know how fashion experts always say that every woman needs only "10 easy pieces" in her wardrobe? The crisp white shirt, the perfectly tailored blazer, the great black pants, blah, blah, blah? Not that that advice isn't perfectly legitimate, it's just that when we're shopping, it's not the black pants and white shirts that grab the eye now, is it?

Somehow, though, designer Charles Nolan continues to perfectly bridge that line between the classic and the eye-catching, with beautifully tailored separates that flatter a woman's body - women of all ages and shapes. His fabrics are generally sumptuous, and they're what sets him apart from the usual glut of monotony that makes up most mid-tier womenswear.

For fall '08, Nolan was inspired by the costumes he's making for a production by the American Ballet Theater, saying "It's all about moving forward mindful of the past," in his show notes. There was a certain Edwardian charm to much of the collection, but only in the intricate construction of bodices, seams and tiny puff-shouldered jackets - do not forget that these are modern clothes for modern women.



There may be flashier clothes, but it's doubtful there are more wearable,

flattering clothes with a touch of artsy playfulness. And that's what 10 easy pieces should be all about.

All wrapped up

Herve Leger won fame in the '90s for his skin-tight "bandage" dresses which were worn - and made famous - by the original supermodels, Cindy Crawford, Naomi Campbell, Linda Evangelista, et. al (Check out that Robert Plant "Addicted to Love" video to see vintage Leger.) Through a not uncommon turn of events in the fashion industry, Leger lost the rights to his own name when he sold his business, which eventually landed in the hand of Max Azria. The BCBG designer/millionaire has three shows going this week in the tents of Bryant Park, but he seemed to find an extra well of creativity with which to handle the legacy of Leger.

"Has anyone seen my pants?" He pulled it off, I think, nearly replicating the master's touch with color blocking his strips of Spandex. If the hemlines were far too short, that can be forgiven for the excesses of the runway. Of course, only .05 percent of women in this country can actually wear these dresses (and most of them were in the tents today, a virtual calvacade of hobbling celebs such as Joss Stone, Mandy Moore, Joy Bryant, Sophia Bush and Amy Smart). For the other 99.5 percent, Azria threw in a couple tantalizing toppers - a wool jacket and sweater, pieced as intricately as the dresses, but far easier to wear.

More of those, please, Max, and you just might succeed where so many before you have failed.