

The Star-Ledger

Designers stay the course

Wednesday, January 30, 2008

BY LISA IRIZARRY

Star-Ledger Staff

If you like your look, you can keep it.

That's the great news about what you'll see on the runways at New York's Fashion Week, which begins Friday. The collections for fall 2008 are going to feature a lot we've already seen for the past couple of fall seasons. So a lot of it's already in your closet -- retro inspirations from the '80s back to the Renaissance; lots of grays, blues, greens and reds; some vivid colors; some richer, darker hues; lots of black; and dressier and more elegant, but still very wearable looks.

The people have spoken, and designers are continuing to listen: No more head-spinning changes in styles each season. Instead, give us more of a variety of choices that can translate from the runway into real life and onto real bodies.

Although the current talk of recession hadn't started when designers went to their drawing boards, not having to think about buying a whole new wardrobe to be stylish this fall is certainly another good thing.

"I think the fashion cycle is slowing down a bit and we're seeing one season building upon another," notes eBay style director Constance White. "There are a lot of multi-trends these days. It can be confusing, but there are more options.

"When the skinny pant came out, there were a lot of questions about whether women were really going to wear this. What I observed happening was that teens and women in their early 20s were really into the skinny leg," she says. "Now women can opt for a wider and softer leg"

"And now the seasons evolve, instead of this head-spinning 'Exorcist'-type fashion when one minute something's in, you break the bank, then you're headed in another direction," White says.

Japanese-born designer Tadashi Shoji sees more and more designers headed in the direction in which he says he has always gone: Make fashions women can actually wear. "I want them to look pretty, but be happy," he says.

"There are things for the drama of the runway, but those things are only sold to a few, not like 500 people," he explains. His fashions can be found in stores such as Bloomingdale's and have been worn by such celebrities as Shakira, Tyra Banks and Debra Messing. "If customers don't buy, it doesn't support my business."

Held twice a year, in February and September, Fashion Week gives designers a chance to show off their latest creations to buyers, the media and their clients. Invitation-only shows are held under large tents constructed in Bryant Park just for the occasion, as well as at other Manhattan venues, giving the trend-conscious public a peek at what they can expect to see in the stores. More than 200 shows will be held.

For Shoji's new collection, he was inspired by the rich scarlet, hunter, mahogany and emerald hues found in a Renaissance painting. His runway will include his signature eveningwear as well

as sportswear and daytime dresses. There'll be a lot of very plush, thick fabrics; and hemlines will be a more user-friendly knee length instead of the minis he has featured in past shows.

In contrast to Shoji's heavier colors and fabrics, Rebecca Taylor was inspired by the fragility of loved, stored-away clothes and the romance of stepping into another time. Her dresses will have an easy, lofty feel reminiscent of the late '30s, including florals, beading, lace and chiffons. Opulence is evoked in the pairing of a neutral palette and rich jewel tones. Also look for dramatic maxi coats in leopard jacquard as well as menswear-inspired blazers.

Another designer, Charles Nolan, looked to one of his favorite arts -- ballet -- for his creations. His collection includes full skirts and rocker jeans that will share the catwalk with more elegant fashions.

Lisa Irizarry may be reached at lirizarry@starledger.com or (973) 392-5977.