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JULIO

A YOUNG TALENT ON THE RISE

After a creative pause, fashion designer Julio Espada made a remarkable comeback during last November's New York Fashion Week. Store buyers and fashion press turned up in numbers at the Eastside antique store for the opening of his first collection in almost three years. Against a background of ornate period furniture and ornamental artifacts, the purity of the young Puerto Rican's designs created some eye-catching contrasts. In a season when many played it safe with Franco-American classics, his exciting colorations and minimalist shapes were a welcome relief, and a convincing exercise in innovative fashion design.

Behind the simplicity of his draped jerseys and the bold color mixes of his cottons stands the extraordinary talent and artistry of Julio Espada. While still a child in San Juan, his artistic genius was recognized and developed at a special school for artistic children. Before his graduation, the young student of art was already in business, designing costumes for local television stars and private clients. A chance acquaintance, who later became his business partner, persuaded the then eighteen-year old to come to New York in 1973. Together they set up a retail outlet for Julio's creations, of which he recalls: "The interior design of the shop was quite avant-garde and made history in fashion retailing. It had quilted plastic walls and ceramic floors, and it almost cost us our business. Because in two months we had only made two sales." The breakthrough occurred when Bonwit-Teller, Henri



Julio Espada

1-2-3 Julio's striking color mixes in cotton satins, poplins and voiles by FISBA/Christian Fischbacher.

4 His masterful drapings in solid colored jersey by Abraham.

(Photos: Marshall Wilson)

Bendel, Saks and other store buyers discovered the unusual fashion workshop. Magazines and private clients followed and, between them, the business grew very big, very fast. By 1978, in less than five years, Julio's one-man operation had expanded into a substantial wholesale corporation, with an annual turnover of 9 million dollars.

While the Nipons claim that their fashion empire had been built on buttons and bows, Julio's was built on the conspicuous absence of either. He still refuses to use conventional buttons and zippers, preferring metal hooks and buckles instead. In taking his designs forward, the spring collection reflects a matured mood, inspired by worker's uniforms played off against bias draping reminiscent of Vionnet. His daytime suits and jumper dresses are a striking color mix of jewel-toned cotton satins, poplins and voiles from Fisba. For evening, Julio cuts simple shifts in Abraham's black jersey and handstencils them in a bleached "rayograph" pattern. Asked why most of the 22 outfits were done in Swiss fabrics, the designer said:

“ Every time I shop for cottons, I find that I like Swiss cottons best. Whereas prints were my signature at one time, I now prefer to mix solid colors. To my mind, both the quality and the colorations of the Fisba cottons enter into today's mood in fashions. As to the Abraham jersey, it has been my most successful material since I started in business. For a jersey, it is very dry, it drapes beautifully, it goes from day to night and it travels extremely well. The Abraham jersey has been my trademark for many years, and customers actually come back asking for it. ”

Seeing the first full range after the liquidation of his multimillion dollar enterprise, it is evident that Julio's exceptional talent has not only survived but is reasserting itself stronger than ever. Talking about future plans, the sensitive artist shyly admits that he hopes to establish a solid fashion wholesale business in America, where buyers will get a good product and dependable deliveries. One cannot help but endorse this hope and wish for a sound business management to create an environment in which Julio's rare gift may develop.

Beatrice Feisst



MEETING SWISS FABRIC FRIENDS

