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Autor: Moore, Jackie
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SOFT MOOD

By Jackie Moore
Photos: Christopher Moore



Ralph Lauren's silk suit with Swiss lace camisole.

The hand of Christian Lacroix could be seen all over the New York spring collections, as it had been in every other fashion city. At least his fichu necklines and pouf skirts looked more at ease in the home of the Gala dinner than in urbane Milan, especially when they were handled by designers like Bill Blass and Scaasi.

The favourites of the luncheon set ladies are masters of the elaborate evening dress. For spring they prefer the shorter cocktail length, in stiff dry fabrics like faille, silk ottoman and taffeta. Bubbly cloqués and treebark crêpes provided additional surface texture.

Prints were florals of all kinds, from positive/negative effects in duo-tones to the all-over multi-coloured exotic blooms. Whether the prints are floral, stripes, spots or geometric they are available on an infinite variety of fabrics. There are cotton cloqués, linens, gazar and, most exciting of all, moirés. In general the prints are on white grounds but at Ralph Lauren his single spray florals are no navy or chocolate, while Calvin Klein chose ecru as the foil for his delicate iris or rose heads. The fabrics were different but the aim was the same. At both Lauren and Klein skirts were soft, gentle, full affairs, in keeping with the change of mood from several of the top designers on Seventh Avenue.

Lauren, Klein, the late Perry Ellis made New York ready to wear a haven for the young executive woman. Their softly tailored sportswear in menswear fabrics fitted into the office environment, giving their wearers confidence and credibility as they made their way up in the business world.

Last season we began to see a crack in the executive wardrobe when dresses took attention away from the neat blazer suits.

For spring '88 there is a more dramatic change.

Slick suits are still there but they are to be found in the Bill Blass, Oscar de la Renta, Herrera and Roehm collections. The social set will be wearing spencer jackets and crisp above-the-knee skirts in gabardine, gingham or dogstooth check wools and baratheas. They could have the new longer, fingertip length jacket, buttoned to the neck and trimmed with a flower or with a wide, curling cape collar, in the same family of fabrics.

On the other hand, the young executive who shops at Lauren is expected to be seen in softly swinging chiffon skirts and fingertip length crêpe jackets, with long, lean lapels and one button fastening at the waist. The same jacket shape accompanies classic trousers and navy is the major colour. Softest suede, in pale pink, is belted over lace trimmed camisoles. A waist-length blouson suit with narrow skirt is in navy satin.

At Calvin Klein day clothes scarcely had a role to play at all. There were bolero jackets in black and white dogstooth check and sleek pastel blue or pink gabardine, worn with high waisted above-the-knee skirts or equally high-rise, lightly tapering trousers. These were few, however, before the collection moved into the flowerhead prints on crêpe de chine and a group of stained glass coloured satins. Scoop necked tunics, wrapped shawl-collared knee-length coats and, above all, slip dresses prevailed in both fabrics.

The slip dress is clearly Calvin Klein's answer for hot days in the office, though these skinny vest shapes will hardly help to keep the atmosphere cool. The same shape goes through for evening in silver lace, thigh- or floor-length, accompanied by heavily embroidered duchess satin stoles.

At Donna Karan the air is still more romantic, with stretch lace her favourite fabric for day, in scoop necked tops and skinny skirts, each worn with stretch wool crêpe. Karan has not abandoned her easy long jackets. There are lean blazers with soft back belts, others are cut with a low vee neckline fastened by a simple flower at the waist. There are wide trousers in midnight blue wool gauze and soft bermuda shorts in stretch wool crêpe, but lace is her major story, used not only in the heavier stretch but also in a delicate version for circular skirts. Karan feels that she has covered what she calls the basics of boardroom dressing; clothes that spell power. Now women need something softer and skintier.

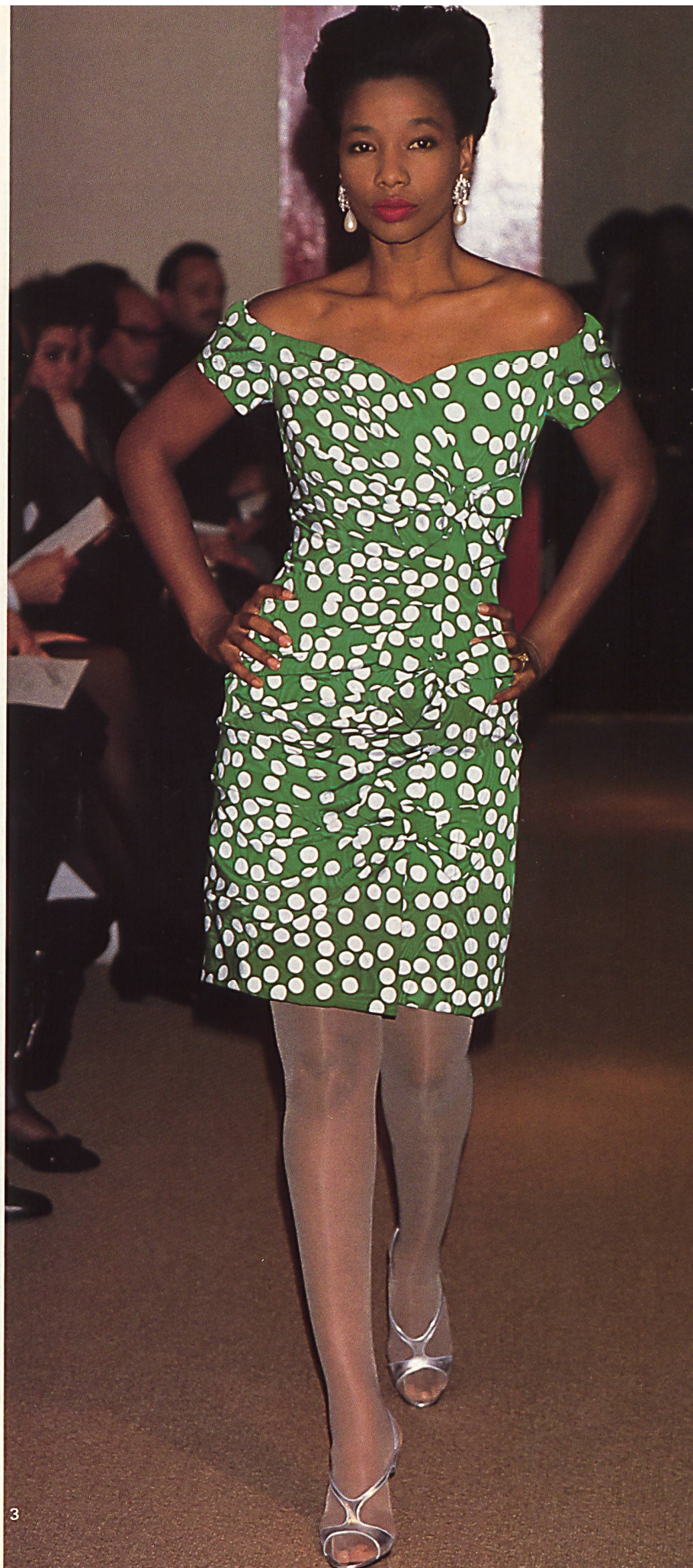
Michael Kors, coming along fast, combines the two with his oversized drop-shoulder, deep vee shirts in cotton or organza but tucks them into the shortest, skinniest tube skirts in stretch cotton poplin or silk. He adds a band of elasticated fabric at the hem of his shirts to ensure a good fit.

It was left to Donna Karan's old partner in design at Anne Klein to offer the more businesslike clothes, for the woman who is not quite ready for stretch cling and lace. Louis dell'Orio offered narrow zip fronted skirts in brown, brick red or palm green cotton sateen, with cotton Lycra T-shirts and safari shirt-jackets in the same colours. "I don't believe in radical changes" says Louis.

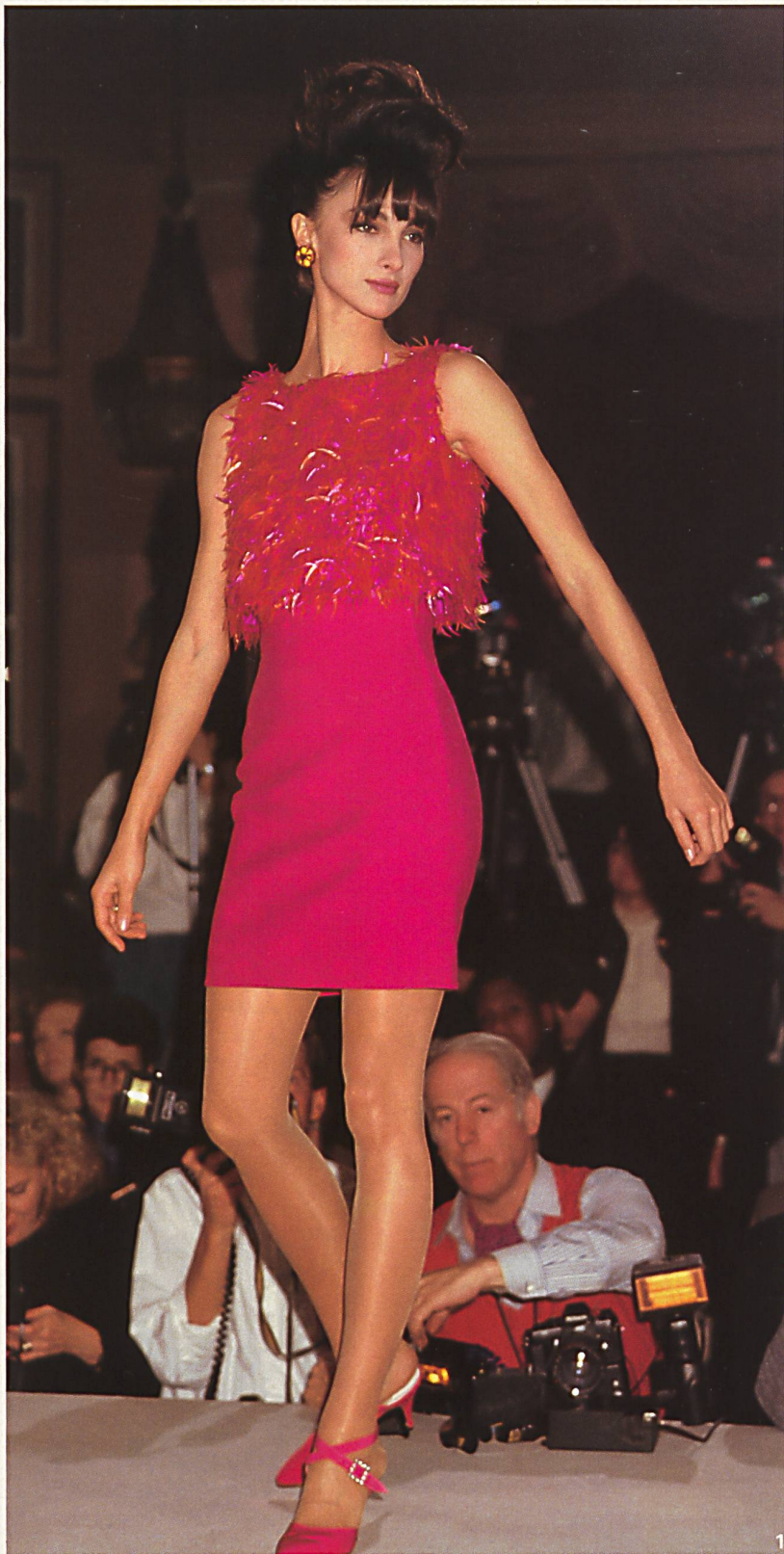
Nevertheless, along with most of the colleagues on 7th Avenue, his skirts and bermuda shorts reveal the knees and beyond.



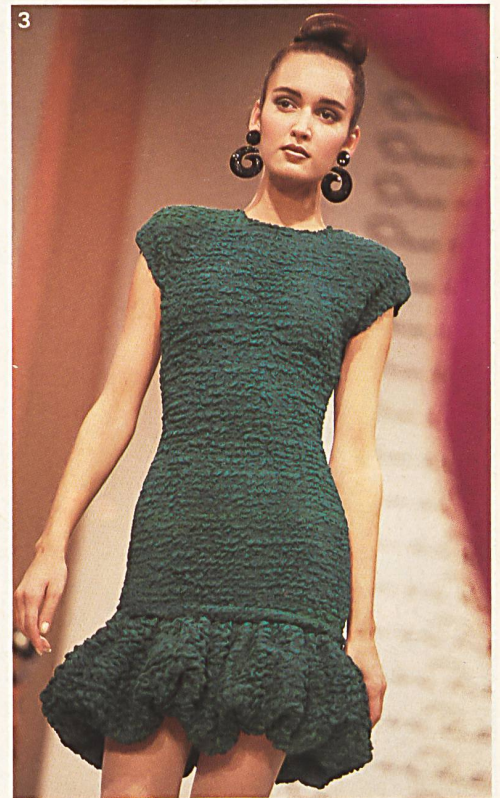
1.-3. Series of green and white prints from **Scaasi**. (Fabrics from Abraham)



New York Fashion



1. Pink cloqué strapless dress under lesage beaded jacket from **Roehm**. Fabric from **Abraham**.
2. Black cloqué for a dress with tiered sleeves from **Oscar de la Renta**.
3. Cap-sleeved body-hugging dress in heavy silk cloqué from **Abraham**. **Oscar de la Renta**.





1. Black and white cotton moiré Abraham from **Scaasi**.
2. Corset top and pouf skirt in black and white from **Oscar de la Renta**.
3. Ingénue dress in white gazar from Abraham with ecru jacket. **Geoffrey Beene**.

