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Coming, as they invariably do, at the rail end of the show season has given the American ready-to-wear designers the role of consolidators, summing up many of the trends that have emerged earlier from Milan and Paris. This has inevitably given critics the opportunity to say that here is no innovative talent in New York, just copyists.

This is somewhat unfair, since someone has to show last and who is to know whether the designers of Milan could be accused in the same way if the timing were reversed. Certainly there are those collections which encourage that feeling of "déjà vu" but at least what is copied is the best of Yves Saint Laurent and Givenchy. Equally there is much that is truly American in its approach and this was a season which gave Seventh Avenue the opportunity to present itself at its best. The exchange of the sharp-edged chic of Nancy Reagan for the softer style of Barbara Bush is reflected throughout the collections from what is called the luncheon set designers.

This has been a general mood, in fact, from the collections of Armani, Ferrè and Versace in Milan through to Bill Blass and Oscar de la Renta in New York. It has had its effect on fabrics, bringing surface interest to the fore and reviving a treasure trove of cloths we haven't seen for many a season.

Ratinés and bouclés were used to great effect by both the veteran Geoffrey Beene and the newcomer Isaac Mizrahi, who each showed the deep sleeved, full backed silhouette that is very strong for next season. Mohair appeared with angora for soft ponchos at Oscar de la Renta and was featured by young Marc Jacobs as thigh-high knitted bubble dresses in his first collection for Perry Ellis.

Brushed wools, wool velours and luxurious alpaca or cashmere cloths all reminded us that it is the handle and texture, together with colour that really adds up to the fashion story this autumn rather than dramatic changes in shapes. Alongside the warmer handle wools there is an alternative fabric story, relying on dry, flatter fabrics but still with softness rather than a crisp finish. Wool or silk crêpes, flannel (sometimes printed), and, above all, jerseys are the leaders here.



AMERICAN FASHION MOOD

TEXT: JACKIE MOORE
PHOTOS: CHRISTOPHER MOORE

Jersey is growing stronger each season, whether for softly draped dresses or more shapely jackets, like the Oscar de la Renta U-seamed suits. Double faced cloths and reversibles were a special feature of the New York collections, often with fur trimmings for a still more luxurious effect. As always it was Geoffrey Beene who provided the

most innovative moments, mixing textures with a masterly abandon. A waist length jacket in ribbed wool was paired with flannel pants, a circle of shot taffeta around the neckline. The abbreviated bolero is his signature this season, the most miniscule just a pair of joined sleeves in black crêpe. A slightly more substantial version in grey

brushed wool is embroidered in tracteries of jet beads, making another Beene statement on the subject of mixing day with evening. Colour was more important than ever in New York but again there is more subtlety and elegance rather than making bold gestures.

Calvin Klein led the way with his gentle blends of colour, described by him as the kindest he has ever used. Palest sage green is used with chocolate and he employs the whole family of sand, camel and caramel, sometime adding the palest grey. Even Oscar de la Renta, the flamboyant South American, was restrained in both colours and embroideries this season. A deep raspberry coat was worn with a slate grey dress, belted in tan leather. A jersey tunic suit is in ochre, doubling to heliotrope blue.

Young Isaac Mizrahi has a wonderfully confident eye for colour, mixing melon, peach and rosewood in corduroy and silk, or all the spices — cinnamon, mustard and saffron are in melton and flannel. A short belted jacket in pumpkin wool is worn over a paprika T-shirt and rose pants.

With Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren, Michael Kors and Donna Karan the major theme is the one-button jacket, sometimes oversized, over a simple cable-knit cashmere crew neck sweater and either a gently wrapped skirt, classic pants or, at Michael Kors, wide tailored shorts. The hooded parka jacket is universal, often edged with fur, and in satin, wool velours or quilted microfibre.

Lengths bare the knee or reach the low calf, usually over matching tights. Oscar de la Renta adds touches of embroidery to the collars and pockets of his melton coats, Carolina Herrera has gold braid as shape emphasis on her black velvet jackets, while Michael Kors puts ankle-length skirts in navy lace under his textured rib knit jackets. Old gold, pewter and bronze appear for evening in metallic twills, lamés and the incredibly lightweight organzas at Geoffrey Beene.

Lamé is an important fabric for evening, whether it be the laquered effect florals from Schläepfer at Oscar de la Renta, the Paisley patterned bathrobe dresses at Donna Karan or the infinite variety of animal prints so superbly created by Abrahams for Bill Blass.

△ OSCAR DE LA RENTA. FABRIC FROM SCHLAEPPER.

OSCAR DE LA RENTA. FABRIC FROM SCHLAEPPER.





BILL BLOSS. FABRIC FROM ABRAHAM.

OSCAR DE LA RENTA. FABRIC FROM SCHLAEPFER.



OSCAR DE LA RENTA. FABRIC FROM SCHLAEPFER.

