

NEWCITY CHICAGO

A Certain Style

Fashion Focus Chicago Diary

By Jennifer Berg

September 25, 2006: Fresh Faces in Fashion

Gen Art's Fresh Faces in Fashion kicked off the biggie Fashion Focus shows in Millennium Park.

Famous for launching the careers of up-and-comers who were soon fixtures on the fashion scene, this was one of Zac Posen's first big shows.

The evening began with a cocktail reception in an enormous white tent covering the rooftop terrace. I arrived unfashionably early (before the bar was even open) but had a chance to peruse an uncrowded exhibition of accessories by local designers: shoes by Elizabeth Brady and Mohop, Obi sashes by Vanessa Penna and vintage-inspired garments by Kit LaCroix.

As the cocktail reception grew more crowded, I embarked on the week's most excellent bout of mingling. Dynamic scenesters from all kinds of industries popped by--PR execs, fashion designers, writers, photographers, philanthropists--it was a great, energetic group and everyone seemed jazzed to be there.

A group of people standing at the back gave this show a "standing room only" mystique, while front rows were seemingly dominated by the young press, though recognizable fashion veterans (think Nena Ivon, director of Saks PR and producer of Fashion Columbia) sat ringside as well.

The designers represented on the runway: Daniella Siahou, Joynoelle, Marlena Maree, Shanel Regier, Sujata Gazder and Vati Itthi. I had a lovely email parlance with several of these designers over the course of the week, just to get the basic scoop on some of their lines, so check out what they had to say here.

I did want to mention the collection of one designer I wasn't able to get in touch with, Shanel Regier. She lives in Milwaukee (for now, anyway--I hope she'll move here) and designs to the beat of bygone eras. Her spring 2007 collection reminded me of a ballroom scene from Cinderella: There were pouffy sleeves, corset-like details and a color palette inspired by the pinks, creams and greens of flower petals. Her clothing was impeccably pretty, and it was artistic and wearable en meme temps.

The evening ended with a packed after-party at downtown's James Hotel--the current hotspot for upscale but young soirees. Most of the designers came, which was nice, and a DJ spun hits from the nineties, which means that everyone in his or her twenties (that'd be me!) busted out some moves. Oh dear.

September 26, 2006: Sister Cities Fashion Show

Reported by Mark Rumble

As Chicago reached the midway point of throwing the world's most fashionable tent party (also known as Fashion Focus Chicago 2006), the city decided to make the affair a little more global and so presented World Fashion Chicago. Hosted by the Chicago Sister Cities International Program, the event proved that in the fashion world, Chicago has many allies, including Paris, whose committee within the Chicago Sister Cities Program hosted the pre-show reception. Apparently Chicago's recent ban on foie gras hasn't caused too much of a rift with its relationship with the French.

The pre-show reception featured drinks, French-inspired appetizers and beefed-up security awaiting the arrival of Mayor Richard M. Daley. Understanding the trends of world

fashion can be confusing, but throwing a good pre-fashion show reception is not. And the Sister Cities committee got it right by not deviating from the recipe of an open bar and plenty of hors d'oeuvres.

The actual fashion show began with a speech from Mayor Daley explaining the importance of Fashion Focus and the importance of international designers. This was followed by a model strutting down the catwalk while holding a globe, which was followed by each designer being announced by their hometown. The force-feeding of the theme to the audience was a little much, but then again, watching a model in heels spin a globe was rather memorable.

The show's flaws were all fairly minor. World Fashion Chicago delivered the goods and left the packed tent with plenty to talk about. Milan fashion houses Dolce and Gabbana and Armani seemed to get the biggest rise out of those at hand, which came as no surprise since familiar couture is always a crowd pleaser. The fashion show lasted about forty-five minutes and gave the audience a sampling of international designers from Chicago's twenty-five sister cities. And it proved that Chicago can certainly hold its own when speaking the international language of fashion.

September 27, 2006: Designers of Chicago Fashion Show

I was amped up for this show--after my recent romp through the city's independent boutiques (see: Boutiqueville) I was looking forward to seeing some local designers I've recently come to know.

In the tent, a black-and-white image projected onto the wall featured the local design dynamos from Macy's Design Shop. I ran into Cyndi Chan (designer of Ori'en) and asked her if she had any pre-show jitters: "It's a lot of pressure--this is my first show--but once the models are walking down the runway, it's heaven," she said.

The runway featured womenswear from Lara Miller, Cyndi Chan, Doris Ruth, Michelle Tan, Orlando Espinoza, Maria Pinto and Price Walton; menswear was from Kent Nielsen.

Several of the designers sat in the front row, photographing their collections, and the audience was really warm and supportive--there was lots of clapping and cheers, and the whole thing felt like a city-family affair.

For me, part of the spectacle of a fashion show is watching the faces of the audience members. This show was particularly fun for that because it was Chicagoans watching Chicagoans, if that makes any sense--we know these designers personally, or if we don't, we've followed their careers so we feel like we do.

The featured designers evoked specific reactions from the crowd: when Doris Ruth's ladies filed out in the "Nasty girl" wine velvet dress, the antique gold camisole with a vineyard tutu and the party princess skirt in rainbow stripe, everyone seemed to smile, and my seatmate, Melissa Maynard, declared: "these clothes make me want to have fun." When Orlando Espinoza's models floated down the runway in silver silk dresses with draped necklines and raglan sleeve jersey tops paired with body-skimming pencil skirts, several audience members started talking with their hands, making lines and curves in the air, to mimic the impeccable tailoring of Orlando's collection. Orlando designs with silhouettes that make a lady look like a lady.

The evening ended across the street, with a mojito-bar-laden after-party at the China Grill. A lot of local designers made it over, and I logged some bonding time with the "one-to-watch" bag designer of Joelle Nadine.

September 28, 2006: Chicago Is...Red Hot!!!

Back to Millennium Park for the Apparel Industry Board's Chicago Is...Red Hot!!! This affair felt significantly more black-tie than the rest, with a mature, decked-out crowd and the most lavish cocktail hour of the week. The festivities began in a tent a few blocks east of the rooftop terrace, where a live jazz band played, candlelit tables were reserved for the likes of Richard Driehaus, and an elaborate buffet was dotted by festive tomato trees.

At the fashion show, all the seats were individually assigned and the front rows were

dominated by society-page ladies and heavy-hitting philanthropists. The runway show featured a diverse range of fashion: accessories, men's, women's and children's clothing and bridal gowns came from 50 local designers, 28 of whom are emerging talents. All the designers gathered on stage to greet the audience before a lengthy defile, emceed by an energetic announcer, commenced. The show had an upbeat, catchy soundtrack; it was fun to watch some of the city's doyennes bounce along to Christina Aguilera's "Candyman."

Some of the highlights: The elegant jewelry of Susanne Siegel, the fashiony leather bags of Joelle Nadine, and the couture bridal gowns by Caroline DeVillo.

An after-party, held in the rooftop terrace's tent, was packed to the gills (or flaps).

September 29, 2006: Glamorama

My first Glamorama. I was so excited for this fabled event that I wanted to partake in every inch of it--from red carpet arrivals to closing time at the after-party.

My evening started at the side of the Chicago Theater, where young fans with camera phones clustered behind a row of journalists and photographers. The E! Channel's Bobbie Thomas stood at the head of the carpet, acting as commentator for the evening. Being a bit Beyonce-shy (I think they call it star-struck in some circles) I stood by a reporter friend on the red carpet and watched her question a procession of personalities that ranged from Tommy the Krumping Clown to celebrity stylist Phillip Bloch to Ms. Destiny's Child herself.

Inside the Chicago Theater, a well-heeled audience crowded into seats and the show began. The theme of this year's fashion show, "a multi-culti, global fusion of fashion and music" was reflected in a whirlwind crossfire of Marc Jacobs, hip-hop clowns, salsa-fusion from indie band Ozomatli, men's fashion from D&G and the launch of Beyonce's fashion line, House of Dereon. The show was a truly theatrical production, with gigantic screens projecting images from around the world, billowing fog and clapping thunder, men rolling

out in giant beach balls and a live performance of Beyonce's "Crazy in Love."

The fashion was all about unexpected combinations of fabrics and silhouettes. Before the show, I was able to interview Melissa Ryan, Glamorama stylist, and ask her about some trends to look out for on the runway. This is how she summed up the season: "Black is back in a big way. Look for more sober, yet mysterious colors, like silvers, gradations of grey, and of course, black. It's all about volume and proportion. Balloon hems, bubble skirts, and the layering of different lengths and textures in unexpected ways. And don't forget the skinny pant! Layered under tunics or dresses, or paired with feminine blouses with wide belts accentuating the waist, the skinny pant is a must-have for fall. Evening is especially glamorous in rich jewel tones, while white and soft metallics add a modern, sophisticated twist. Lastly, we can't forget classic fall luxury, including cashmere, suede, menswear patterns (plaid!) all in a wonderful, autumnal palette." (Read the rest of the interview with Melissa Ryan [here](#).)

Following the show, a shoulder-to-shoulder crowd of Chicagoans headed to Macy's for the after-party, themed "Shanghai Chic." There was something mysterious about being in a closed department store at night--it's the kind of place movies and books are made of (well, at least "Mannequin" and 'Corduroy,' but those count for something.)

The seventh floor of the department store was bustling with fortune-telling geishas, trees dangling plastic goldfish, illuminated fishbowls in the walls, pachinko machines and karaoke booths. International food stations offered everything from fresh-baked pretzels to bubble tea.

An elevator ride to the top floor transported top-ticket holders to the exclusive VIP party, where Beyonce and Michelle Williams mingled with the crowd in a sleek black-and-white atmosphere and a seafood buffet proffered bundles of shrimp and scallops.