

Polyester comes out of the closet

FASHION



Mary Martin Niepold

Polyester — remember when the style conscious wouldn't touch it? — has become Seventh Avenue's Cinderella fiber. Several years ago, anyone in the fashion know wouldn't dream of donning anything but all-natural fabrics like cotton, silk, linen and wool.

The all-natural purists contend that there is a feeling of élan and worldly sophistication derived from wearing non-man-made fabrics. Unfortunately, natural fabrics usually come with skyscraper prices and a lapful of wrinkles.

Today, thanks to technological advances that render poly fibers as soft as down, as crisp as cotton and as smooth as silk, almost no one — fashion experts included — can tell the difference between poly-blend fabrics

and the real McCoy.

The Polyester Fashion Council, a trade organization of U.S. polyester producers, recently devised a "Polyester Touch Test" to convince the fashion establishment that today's poly fibers are as attractive as their 100 percent natural counterparts.

Four pairs of fabric swatches in twill, worsted, crepe de Chine and lace were sent to fashion leaders — mill executives, retailers, manufacturers and editors. Each pair of samples, identical in weight, color and texture, consisted of one all-natural fabric and one blend or all-polyester fabric. A majority of the fashion group failed the test, as did 98 percent of consumers in a recent focus group.

"What we contend," says Joe Murray, chairman of the council and director of marketing for Du Pont, "is that when you take poly and blend it with other fabrics such as cotton, silk, wool, linen or rayon (which is man-made), you end up with a set of properties in the cloth that are better than any by themselves."

The fashion industry is well aware that poly-blend fabrics are perfectly matched to customers' needs — especially in versatile fashions that can travel from car pool to corporate

headquarters to a night on the town with nothing but a change of earrings. Polyester garments hold their shape longer, require less ironing and dry cleaning, and resist wrinkling and shrinking. It's no surprise that today 50 percent of all apparel produced by American manufacturers contains polyester.

Designer Betsey Johnson, beloved for her fun, spirited fashions, says she has always used poly fabrics in her collections, now in their 10th year.

"Polyester, for me, has worked for all my flashy stuff, all the crinolines, all the petticoat items, all the nets and laces. And now, poly has begun to creep in as a price advantage," says the designer.

In Johnson's "cotton" plaid collection for fall, for instance, poly-cotton fabrics were used because "if I had

used 100 percent cotton, it would have been three times as expensive.

"All my full skirts, ruffles and tiers require so much fabric that I have to be very aware of the final price to my customer," Johnson concludes.

The price advantage of poly-blend fabrics is evident in most of the new fall collections, especially the late-day styles that swirl and pouf with as much as eight yards of fabric.

Eveningwear designer Jon Haggins is another Seventh Avenue creator who loves to work with polyester. He says that half of his fall collection includes polyester, either in taffeta or poly-jersey.

"The price (of the finished clothes)

is not necessarily cheaper," say Haggins, "because of the amount of yards used or handwork like beading, which pushes the price up." Haggins points out that a poly fabric can cost about \$5 a yard, as opposed to silk, at about \$15 a yard. When you use lots of fabric, the savings become apparent.

"What's good about polyester," Haggins continues, "is that it doesn't wrinkle and it travels beautifully. You can unpack and just shake it out, and you don't have to have a valet."

"Polyester maintains the length of the fabric," adds Johnson. "It's a good look for a long time. I will definitely continue using it. It's a quiet constant."

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Photo Tips

by Peter Moss

Although Photo Art is five months away, now is a good time to try your hand at public display before the big event. Fall Fair time has arrived and what better way to start exhibiting some prints to the public at large. Most Fall Fairs have either a print or photographic display section open to all. Don't be surprised if it is not open to professionals. Upcoming Fall Fairs include Georgetown, Acton, Milton, Brampton and Erin, and what better way to have a day or weekend outing and who knows? maybe take home a ribbon or prize for your much deserved efforts!

Fall colour is now upon us and although for many it signals the end of summer for photography it can be your most spectacular walking season. Autumn is a good time to try your portrait techniques as nature provides us with rich blue skies, a leafy coloured carpet and a backdrop of rich reds, golds, yellows and greens to give your subject/subjects that perfect, natural compliment.

Working outdoors this time of year, you might find that this is your golden opportunity to try your Full Length Portrait Technique rather than head and shoulders or 3/4 length only. Admittedly the pastoral scenery is a photograph in its self, however it is also a perfect compliment to a full length portrait. Keep in mind that you are not confined to a single portrait, you can use this chance to photograph the entire family (yourself included - by means of your self timer) or just the kids playing in the leaves.

Please do not discard the idea of no head and shoulders in this situation as your backdrop is as beneficial to this technique as it is to your full length shooting.

Try to use nearby trees, a handy split rail fence or even a solid colour background provided by mother nature to augment your subject.

Remember also that if you work at a large opening (ie 11.8, 12.0, 12.8 etc.) your overall effect on your background will be a softening of that portion of the photo, and if you are going to work at a small stop (ie 11.0, 12.0, 12.8) not only will your subject be sharp but a sizeable area in your background will also be sharp. A good idea is to shoot using both methods. - Have Fun!

Peter G Moss Photography

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