


# FASHION

## for Spring



### Fashion veteran

## Geoffrey Beene lauds practical chic

By Joan Lebow

After more than three decades on Seventh Avenue, white-haired and soft-spoken Geoffrey Beene is still making plenty of statements. His strong opinions about fashion, work, comfort and style are expressed in his choice of fabrics and silhouettes.

"For about five years, I've been saying that the whole future of clothes lies in performance," he says in his lingering Southern drawl. "I began to see that many of the clothes coming out of Europe were irrelevant to modern dressing."

The 60-year-old designer, considered by many in the fashion industry to be the best in the business, tends to shun the social limelight, and avoids being a salesman for his clothes. But he has been outspoken in his belief that practicality and style can — and should — go together.

Beene has repeatedly stressed the importance of synthetics in fashion's future. For spring, his vividly colored Ultrasuede trapeze jackets are an example of the designer's willingness to practice what he preaches. Beene uses the washable, man-made and still expensive suede-like fabric in his collection because, he says, "it works, and it endures."

Beene says the once-popular Ultrasuede went out of fashion because of snobbishness. "Just because something is synthetic and not a natural fiber, I don't have any hangups about it," says Beene.

He also has no apologies for the price of his clothes, which, however "practical," cost thousands of dollars. "I don't design for every woman," he explains. "I design for a modern woman who has arrived, succeeded and can afford these prices. I have no qualms about that."

But in fact, the veteran designer who has dressed every first lady since Jackie Kennedy, as well as countless socialites and celebrities, is today catering to customers with different needs. "As more women pay for their own clothes, they're going to be more demanding about how their clothes are made," says Beene.

If both sexes are to arrive at a more sensible mode of dress in the work place, both will have to make some changes, says Beene, who often wears a cardigan sweater with his shirt and tie.

"Men will have to give up some of their rigidity in dress, their total propriety," he says. "And women are going to have to give up some of their frivolity."

In Beene's estimation, one impractical trend is the tightness of today's clothes. "There are a lot of short, slim clothes that are getting too tight for women," he says. "For spring, I've made a lot of very full, sort of trapeze-type dresses. Again, they're made as a statement that clothes were being made with too much conformity."

Beene stops short of criticizing other designers who have been leading fashion into a devil-may-care look, a frilly and even fussy style. But, he says, "the way women are dressing for work and even for themselves is not ideal. You'll see a change, a backlash. It (those styles) will have proven to be fairly trendy. It's a last gasp. At what, I don't know."

The issue of practicality almost automatically raises the question of hemlines, a subject Beene thinks has gotten too much attention. His spring collection is full of shorter lengths, which he says "work" because they look modern, there's less fabric, and they're easier to get around in.

"But I think women should have the option," he stresses. "I see a woman as an individual and not part of the masses."

Beene's singular view of fashion crystallized after he dropped out of premedical studies at Tulane University in New Orleans in the early 1940s. He left his native Louisiana for school in California and got a job in the I. Magnin department store in Los Angeles.

Beene later studied fashion in New York and then Paris, where he was influenced by designers like Elsa Schiaparelli and Captain Molyneux. He returned to the United States in 1949 and worked for several Seventh Avenue designers before debuting his own collection in 1953.

The winner of eight Coty Awards and two from the Council of Fashion Designers of America, Beene is known above all for his unusual fabric sense, simple cuts and quality dressmaking.

Even in the costly world of couture, Beene's designs are considered expensive.



Geoffrey Beene

### Stripes ahoy!

## Nautical look makes a splash with kids

By Joan Lebow

What woman can't remember the navy blue and white dress she wore as a girl? Whether frilly or simple, it often had a wide, square collar or a knotted front tie.

Men recall their own sailor suits, the starched kind that bared their chubby knees. Or they may have happier memories of themselves dressed as young deckhands in striped T-shirts and white sailor hats.

Even in fashion, some things don't change.

trend has intensified.

"The nautical theme is more prevalent in every children's product this spring, not just apparel," says Lynda M. Johnson, style editor of Children's Business, a trade publication that reports on all types of juvenile merchandise. Nautical details are showing up in everything from toys, bedding and strollers to diaper bags, according to Johnson.

Such widespread use of a recognizable theme has prompted children's clothing manufacturers to be especially inventive. "We're using traditional stripes in not-so-traditional clothes," says Beth Kmec, design director for Head Sport Girls. "This year's navy and white children's clothes are taking off from a European interpretation of the nautical look."

trend for Mexx Girls, an American collection from a Dutch children's-wear line. Solids, stripes, gingham and dot prints are used together in one outfit. "We call it nautical and natty," says retail operation manager Ernie Sulpizio.

Just as women are wearing more traditionally feminine clothes, Sulpizio expects girls sizes 7 to 14 to wear more skirts and dresses this spring. Cheerleader skirts or short, flared skirts with flounced hemlines will be widely seen in girls' playclothes.

"The child is now really aware of what she wants to wear," says Jaye Bernstein, owner of Baby Boxer, Inc., in Los Angeles. "She wants clothes that are tighter and closer to the body. If her mother's skirt has a split in the back, she wants that, too."

Designers have brought the timeless sailor look up to the minute by pairing blue and white stripes of multiple widths, and merging stripes with dots. Also, vibrantly colored boating flags and emblems brighten up wide bandeau-neck tops, bottoms and accessories.

This season, shorts come in all lengths and shapes for boys and girls. Stretchy, body-hugging fabrics echo trends in adult fashion and are used in bicycle shorts and capri pants. Skirts are popular, too, worn in kicky, free-wheeling layers that are anything but sweet and staid.

While the nautical look has endured year after year as a fresh, attractive theme for kids' fashion, this year the

One of the strongest spring looks for girls and boys is the short, boxy top. It's similar to what grownups will be wearing this spring, a comfortable change from longer, slouchy clothes.

Among Head Sport's latest fashion silhouettes are fly-away tops, which are wide at the bottom and close-fitting on top, another shape seen in women's sportswear. There are split skirts, walking shorts and many lengths of leggings. While navy and white predominate, Kmec has added some checks to the striped combinations, a twist on a classic look.

Many designers combine a variety of stripes in a single outfit. Spring dresses from E.J. Gitano, for example, pair a horizontal awning stripe and a vertical ticking stripe in a nautical chemise.

Mixing patterns is also a strong

Bernstein says this year's children's clothes will be more fashionable than ever. "There's more fashion in children's wear, right down to budget-priced clothes."

Baby Boxer's designs include nautical themes translated into pastel colors. Stripes turn up in stretch styles, like a puckered knit top and skirt, or bike shorts with a cropped top.

A step beyond bike shorts is what previous generations of kids called pedal pushers. CHANCE! Inc. offers garment-washed pedal pushers in horizontal stripes with a white T-shirt.

But in fact, the veteran designer who has dressed every first lady since Jackie Kennedy, as well as countless socialites and celebrities, is today catering to customers with different needs. "As more women pay for their own clothes, they're going to be more demanding about how their clothes are made," says Beene.

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From left: E.J. Gitano's flounced sundresses with or without cardigan (dress, \$12; cardigan, \$18); 100 percent cotton shorts (\$4.99) and shirt (\$8.99) from CHANCE! by General Sportwear; oversized polo (\$15) and mini (\$14) from E.J. Gitano's "Fun in the Sun" collection; striped cycling pants (\$9.99) and tank top (\$6.99) from CHANCE!

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