

Fashion Outlook

Mrs. Taki's Kids

Children's wear gets sophisticated

By Helen Burggraf

A couple of years ago, Beverly Ann Taki complained that she couldn't find well-made, sophisticated clothes for her youngest son, Adam. But being the wife of a wealthy, knowledgeable and well-connected apparel-industry magnate — her husband is Tomio Taki, chairman of the \$150 million company behind such brands as Anne Klein & Co., Anne Klein II and Donna Karan — Mrs. Taki was in a position to do more about it than merely complain. And so she did.

Mrs. Taki's new, mostly unisex line of children's clothes, accessories and shoes, called Mrs. Taki's Kids, recently debuted in the children's-wear departments of some of the nation's top retail stores. Since then, despite prices (and even some styles) that many parents might consider outrageous, the line has been selling like Good Humor popsicles at a playground on the Fourth of July.

"The acceptance has been terrific," says Margot Holland, associate fashion director for children's wear at Saks Fifth Avenue, which carries Mrs. Taki's Kids fall collection in five of its 40 stores. "It fills a void in the marketplace."

"Because there hasn't really been anything like this in the American market before — although there has been in Europe — the supply will create the demand. People will go for it," says Mary Lisa Gavenas, editor in chief of Young Fashions, an upscale trade magazine for children's wear.

Officially, Mrs. Taki's Kids is a separate entity from New York-based Takihyo, Inc., the parent company of Anne Klein and Donna Karan, of which Japanese businessman Tomio

Taki, 53, is chairman. At the same time, it benefits from the unofficial guidance and knowledge of Mr. Taki, to whom company executives report if Mrs. Taki — a striking 42-year-old American of Italian heritage — is not available.

Mrs. Taki's Kids clothes are a Valley girl's (or guy's) dream: leather pants, in black or blue, at \$315 a pair; zip-front Italian leather mini-dresses in purple, blue or black, \$375; coats made of a boucle fabric in chartreuse windowpane checks or black, \$290; dalmatian-printed fun fur polo coats, \$470. There's even a dyed Tibetan lamb coat for \$1,300 and a \$300 tuxedo. Although the emphasis is clearly on the girls' share of the collection, boys are expected to account for some 30 percent of sales.

Surprisingly, petite women — long known to scour children's departments in their desperate search for properly fitting clothing — are expected to account for 15 percent of sales of Mrs. Taki's Kids clothes.

"It's very fashion forward, stylish, contemporary and occasionally whimsical, but also elegant and chic, and finely tuned for children 8 years old and up," says Mrs. Taki of the collection that bears her name.

Although the clothes at first glance appear to have been designed with carefree abandon, in fact the collection is tightly coordinated, utilizing only a handful of colors (mainly purple, chartreuse yellow-green, and a deep periwinkle blue), which are set off with lots and lots of black. All-natural fabrics, leathers, suede and fur do have their drawbacks. These are

not clothes to toss in the washing machine with the Osh Kosh overalls and Levi's.

The introduction of Mrs. Taki's Kids comes at a time when a growing number of well-known designers and apparel manufacturers are entering the better-priced children's apparel field in hopes of tapping the emerging market being created as baby boomers have kids of their own. Also, "people are having their kids later now, and thus have more money to spend on them, and are willing to spend it," notes Gavenas of Young Fashions. Among the labels one may now spot inside the collars of fashionable tots are those of Polo by Ralph Lauren, Christian Dior, Versace, Sonia Rykiel, Laura Ashley, Kenzo, Missoni, Esprit, London Fog and Guess. Both The Gap and Benetton have recently launched children's clothing stores.

Ironically, Adam Taki, now 4 and a bit, still can't wear Mrs. Taki's Kids clothes, it seems that the difficulties involved in launching an apparel line are such that Mrs. Taki decided to concentrate initially only on boys' sizes 8 to 20 and girls' sizes 7 to pre-teen. (Being the boss's son, however, does ensure Adam a steady supply of Mrs. Taki's Kids clothes made especially for him.)

Meantime, Mrs. Taki says she still would like to do girls' sizes 4 to 6x, boys' 4 to 7, and toddlers, "hopefully in a year or two." Also on the drawing board is a lower-priced version of Mrs. Taki's Kids, something like Anne Klein II, the popular Anne Klein spin-off. Free-standing boutiques, here and abroad, and even such products as toiletries, bath products and cookies are also under consideration.

Kids, Mrs. Taki notes, sounding like she should know, take lots of baths, and eat lots of cookies.

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Fashions from Mrs. Taki's Kids, from left: wool/cashmere blazer (\$220) with logo crest and plaid wool/acrylic turtleneck (\$90) with matching pant (\$120); 3-D bear sweater (\$220) with crosscheck asymmetrical pant (\$150); tri-plaid cropped wool-rayon-blend jacket (\$150) with cotton interlock body suit (\$60) and three-tier wool skirt (\$120); and cotton-interlock white zip-front cruise shirt (\$95), wool-cashmere drawstring blazer (\$220) and plaid classic trouser (\$150).

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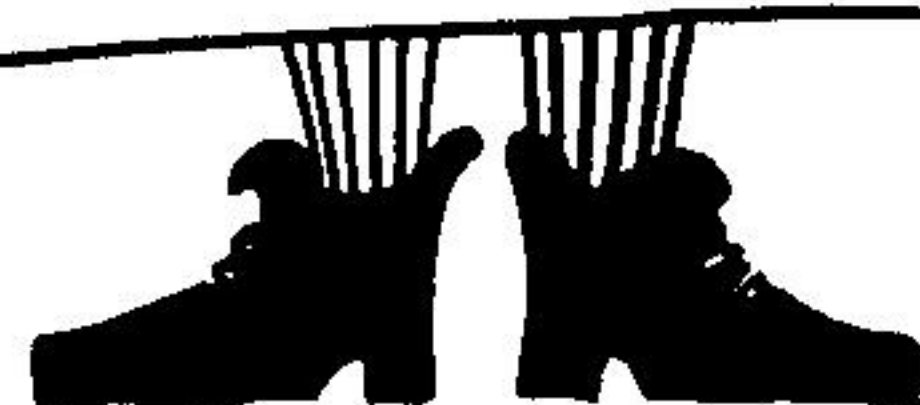
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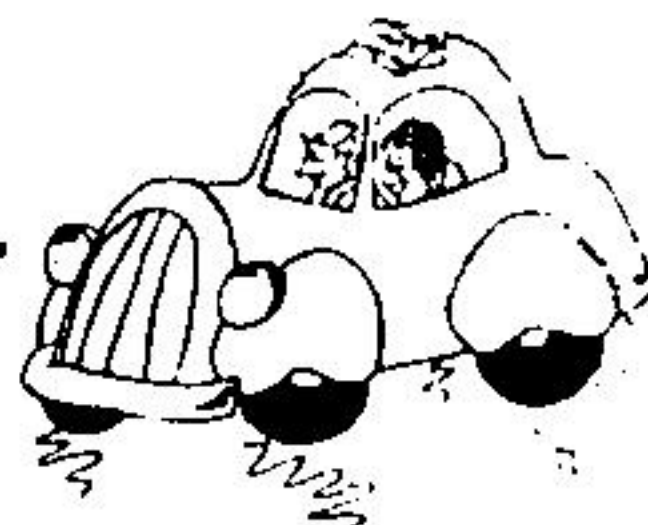
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