

STUDENTS LOOK TO THE PAST FOR THIS YEAR'S FASHION TRENDS

Getting cool for school

BY MITCHELL BROWN
Staff Writer

"Tired of being compared to damn Britney Spears. She's so pretty That just ain't me"

— Pink
"Don't Let Me Get Me"

First, the good news for parents who despise their daughters' belly-baring ways: The Britney look is so over.

At least that's what teens are telling Erin Latimer, research analyst for Big Orbit, a Toronto marketing firm focused on youth.

"From the sounds of the kids, they hate Britney Spears," she said.

"A lot of them just don't like her. The guys will say she's hot, but they don't find her talented. I don't think she's much of a role model anymore."

What this means is teens are dropping Ms Spears' skin-tight, little-girl-lost style of dress in favour of clothing that's a little less revealing, a little less flamboyant and a lot more like what their parents used to wear.

"The retro look is coming back," she said. "It's totally '70s, with the big belts and peasant tops."

Indeed, with the kids getting ready to head back to school, it seems retro styles like the peasant top — that hippie-flavoured, gauzy garment that comes in a variety of earth tones — are becoming the must-have items this fall. But don't just take a marketer's word for it.

Like most of her peers, 17-year-old Nicky Macaro notices what people her age are wearing.

"Yeah, I consider myself someone who is into fashion," the Aurora high-school student says. "I've bought a couple of peasant blouses for myself."

Nicole Goss, a university student from Markham, has her own theory on why peasant tops, fringed bags, denim skirts, tie-dye T-shirts and the like are making a comeback.

"I think it's ... you look at the '70s and that's the time when things happened," she said.

"There was a real youth culture and we had an activism that we don't have today. We've been looking back to the past for fashion ideas for the past 10 years. I don't know why; maybe it's because we don't really have our own identities."

That may be so, but teens today aren't just borrowing from the past; they're adding their own touches to

old styles, beginning with the folded-down track pants and low-riding jeans, which Ms Macaro says are still popular these days with her friends.

While teens may prefer earth tones on their clothing, Ms. Latimer says the top of their heads is another matter.

"Another big thing now is pink hair," she said. "With (reality TV star) Kelly Osborne, singer Pink, and Glen Stefani (of the rock group No Doubt) all sporting pink hair, a lot of kids think it's pretty cool. They want to dye their hairs funky colours."

The buzzwords, she says, are "independence" and "empowerment" — today's young women, living in an age when they're constantly bombarded by images of how the perfect person should look, are struggling to find themselves, which means, in part, they're reinventing old styles, but on their own terms.

As for the boys ... well, darned if Ms. Latimer has any idea what they're up to.

"I really don't know about guys," she said. "I've been looking around, but I just don't know. You can see the retro look for girls in the stores and on the kids, but for guys, it's just ... some guys just don't care. It's so diverse, there doesn't seem to be any set thing."

While girls go retro, the mantra for boys seems to be "go classic" ... or, at least, sporty.

A casual survey of shops catering to the younger crowd suggests an emphasis on the basics for boys — khaki pants, plaid shirts and solid-colour T-shirts and turtlenecks, all accented with the tastefully understated watch or necklace.

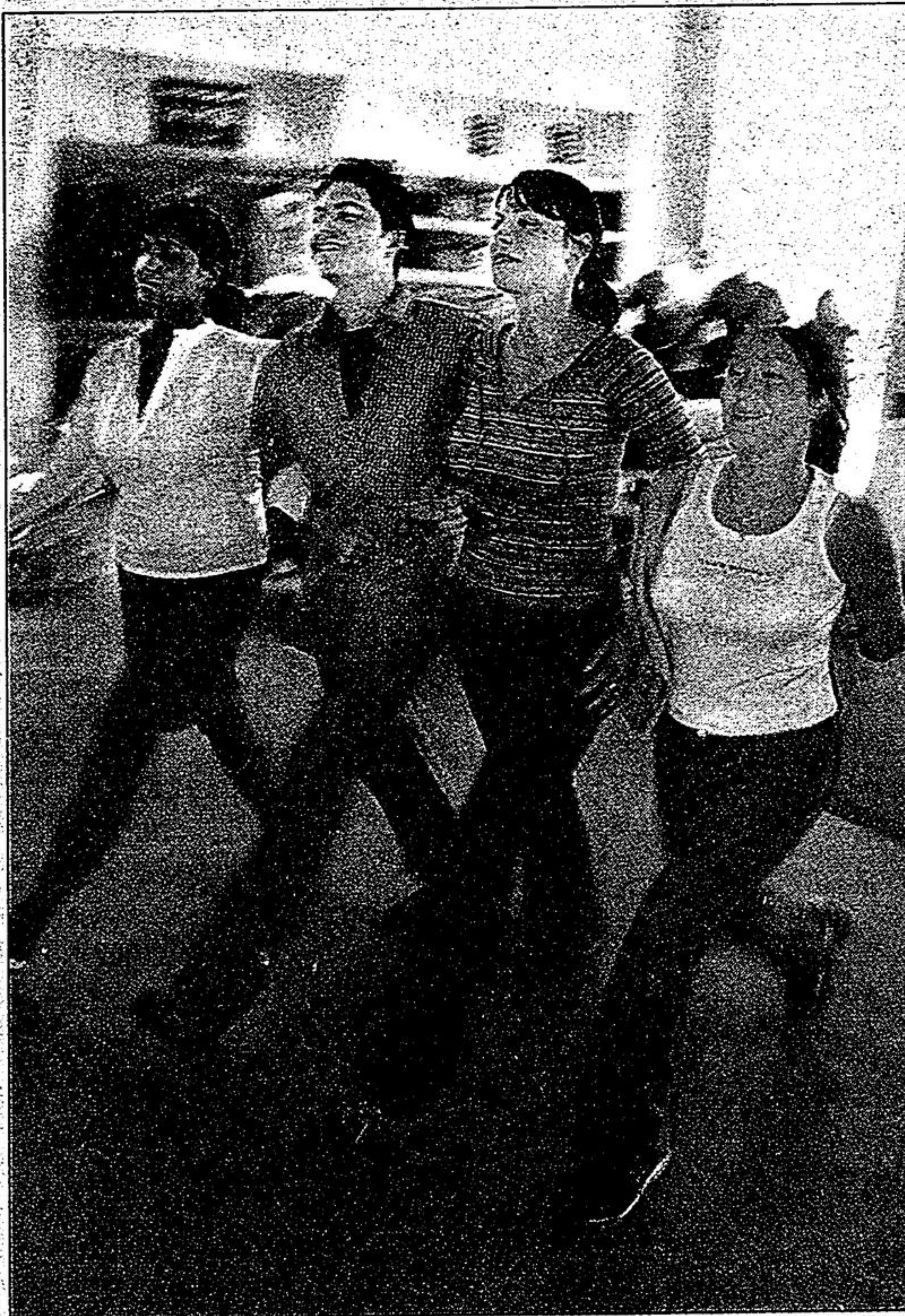
Athletic gear is another must-have for both sexes, with varsity tops, sweatshirts, rugby shirts and, of course, the baggy skateboarder look is still going strong.

"A couple of years ago, there was a big rave scene and baggy jeans were a part of that," Ms. Latimer said.

"And nothing has really taken its place since then. I don't see it as much as I used to, but it's still there."

One thing girls and boys do agree on is where their sense of fashion comes from.

In a recent survey conducted by Ms. Latimer's company, 22 per cent of teens said their clothing decisions were influenced by their friends, 11 per cent said movie stars, 4 per cent said fashion magazines, 2 per cent said their parents ... and 58 per cent marked in "myself".



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Club Monaco employees Marilyn Davis (left), Marco Maltese, Rosa Marchese and Carol Salgado strut some of the latest back-to-school fashions.

Avoiding price tag blues

Cracking the books shouldn't mean breaking the bank.

While it's tempting for parents to give in to their children's cries for the latest and newest in clothes and school supplies, there are a few things you can do to ensure there's a little left for lunch money come September.

Set a budget and stick to it: Make a list of what each child needs to begin his school year and build your budget around those items rather than what he wants.

Involve your children: Children can be tempted by ad campaigns touting the latest "must-have" stuff for school; if you involve them in budgeting, they'll see for themselves how much things cost and be likely to shop frugally.

Teens pay for "must-haves": If your child has earned money from summer jobs, then make a deal with them; you'll pay for the basic supplies if they pay for the expensive "must-have" items.

Wait: If your children can make do with last year's back-to-school clothes and backpacks for a little longer, then hold off on shopping for a week or two. The best time to shop for school supplies is in mid-September, when the stores hold clearance sales to make room for new merchandise.

Gadgets a must on every student's hip list

BY MITCHELL BROWN
Staff Writer

Naturally, back-to-school shopping isn't all about having the right clothes; if anything, it's about having the right back-to-school stuff to help you learn.

Here's a quick run-down of what's cool for school this fall:

High-tech gadgets: Cellphones, digital cameras, MP3 players, personal digital assistants — if it's small and digital, they want it. High-tech

gadgets are huge status symbols among teens right now, with the added bonus it keeps them constantly in touch with friends.

High-tech accessories: For some teens, though, the sleek, grey exterior of a Palm Pilot or cellphone isn't enough. "They have things you can hang off your cellphone," said Erin Latimer, a research analyst for Big Orbit, a Toronto marketing firm that focuses on youth. "They're little clip-ons

with pictures of friends or movie stars that hang from the bottom of cellphones."

Backpacks: Older students tend to go for the brand-name bags carried by stores such as The Gap and Roots, but they'll tell you it's because those bags are more durable and have extra features (such as the cellphone compartment on the shoulder strap). Preteens will follow their lead, but look for younger children sporting Spider-Man,

Harry Potter and Bob the Builder backpacks this fall.

School supplies: Pencils, geometry sets, looseleaf paper — the classics never go out of style, but that doesn't mean yours have to look the same as everyone else's. Binders in translucent colours, pencils festooned with smiley faces, "glitter glue" and Post-It notes shaped like apples and shamrocks are just some of the fun ways retailers have found to perk up their wares.

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