

San Francisco Fashion Week Wrap Up

By Lauren David Peden

August 29, 2005 - San Francisco, CA

Although the second annual San Francisco Fashion Week got off to a rocky start, as we had reported earlier, things improved considerably during the last few days of the shows - at least as far as the fashion was concerned.

Friday night at the Palace of Fine Arts - the venue for all the runway shows that took place from Wednesday through Saturday - heralded the return of Christina Hurvis, who also showed at last year's inaugural event.

Hurvis' s couture level collection was a mix of decidedly grown up cocktail, evening and bridal gowns that showed the more minor league local designers (which is to say, almost everyone who had showed up to that point) how it' s done in the majors. Of course, Hurvis studied in Paris and worked under Jean Paul Gaultier, Gianfranco Ferre (at Dior) and Oscar de la Renta (at Pierre Balmain) for several years, so she has a leg up on the competition when it comes to aesthetics and craftsmanship.

All her dresses were named for jet set travel destinations (Avignon, Majorca, Biarritz, Monaco) and most lived up to the hype. She opened with cocktail dresses and sent the crowd swooning with Marseilles, a strapless black silk organza fit-and-flare number with peacock feathers ringing the bodice and scarlet piping and petticoat. Ibiza, a white satin bias cut halter that dipped low in the front and lower in the back reminded this reporter of Jean Harlow, while Oaxaca' s copper crepe waterfall was sliced with a red chiffon inset that swept from hip to hem, gathered at the side with a sparkling red and pink floral appliqué.

Other unexpected color combos turned up in Tangier, a turquoise and copper lace gown trimmed in mustard velvet that might have looked garish in lesser hands, but was classy with a capital "C" thanks to this designer' s unerring eye. Hurvis also sent out a suite of sophisticated ivory bridal gowns (the last, Cannes, to the strains of "Ava Maria") and wowed us with Sevilla, a black satin strapless ball gown whose red panels were overlaid with black lace - the whole confection tied with a scarlet ribbon.

"I started out being inspired by 1950s/1960s Paris," Hurvis told FWD backstage after the show. "But then I started thinking about Morocco and went to Mexico, so I brought those [things] in terms of color, the laces, the whole feeling."

About as different from Hurvis as you can get, but no less accomplished, was Oda, the wearable art line created by newcomers Mandalyn Begay and twins Angie and Maggie Kim (the trio met at Dartmouth and are currently finishing their fashion degrees at FIDM San Francisco, but we predict very big things for them).

Their spring collection, "Bedouin Princess" was a 21st century homage to mythological heroines.

"We looked at mythical characters and took a silhouette they might have worn or a detail from their costume or something about their personality and worked with it to make something modern," said Angie Kim after the show. They derived further inspiration from Begay' s Native American background.

On the runway, that translated into whimsical-yet-wearable fancies such as an ivory damask feather trimmed pouf skirt with blue and red quilted bobbles and artfully framed cutouts that allowed the yellow underskirt to peek through, a cream cowl neck sweater with fuzzy quilted elbow patches and adjustable ties on the front and back, Little Bo Peep-style lace bloomers under a sweet floral skirt, and a light blue shirtwaist dress with pin tucked bodice, gathered lace sleeves and an ivory chiffon hem. It sounds like overkill, but somehow it all worked. As did the children' s clothes, which would make any little girl' s fairy princess dreams come true.

It was all very Anna Sui meets Heatherette, with a dash of Victor & Rolf thrown in for good measure (most of the models - including the men - sported feathers, branches and leaves in their hair, and most of the clothes were trimmed in wisps of feathers and fur in shades of cream and ecru). On the whole, Oda' s debut collection had an upscale Native American fairytale vibe that was charmingly fanciful rather than stereotypically fey.

Levi' s (San Francisco' s 500-pound fashion gorilla) also showed some Native American and Western-



inspired looks - made by the customization crew at the Union Square flagship store's DIY denim bar - but the majority of the pieces felt thrown together and cliched, save for one cleverly deconstructed maxi skirt with rhinestone-banded leg strap and asymmetrical grommet-sprinkled hem.

On Saturday night, San Francisco was treated to the spectacle that was Colleen Quen's astonishing collection, which she called "The Empresses' New Clothes." Quen, another French-schooled couturier who dresses celebrities like Bai Ling, Viveca A. Fox, Paris Hilton, Gina Davis and Tyra Banks (who has worn Quen's creations on "America's Next Top Model" and to the most recent Daytime Emmy Awards), delivered more of the architectural wonders for which she has become famous (locally, at least).

Like Hurvis, each of Quen's sumptuous outfits were christened with names befitting their fit-for-a-world-traveling-queen leitmotiv.

The crowd erupted in a group cheer-gasp when the first look, China, a floor-sweeping coat of fluttery gold tile shaped ribbons with matching mini dress, came out, followed by the equally arresting Korea, a boxy ivory linen coat, also with matching mini, both of which sported red cutouts that looked like a cross between Asian woodcuts and those craft paper chain snowflakes kids make in third grade.

Less successful was the middle "Empress' Classic Trousseau" looks, a suite of more traditional evening dresses (strapless, snug bodice, full skirt) that looked a bit cumbersome and dowdy as rendered in matte satin - save for the Empress Nagako apple green evening coat, which boasted black frog closures on the placket and sleeves with dramatically seamed cuffs and collar, and Princess Diana, a three tiered French blue confection of stiff-edged columns from beneath which peeked bouquets of colorful yarn flowers.

Quen pulled out all the sartorial stops in the final "Treasures Are Within" series, sending out one show stopper after another, from the tulle-trimmed chocolate and indigo French lace-and-angora Sapphire Elegance and Blue Opal Energy gowns to the flower-festooned Emerald Mystery, which made the model look as though she was blooming from the inside out, to Rhinestone Creativity, an empire waist creation whose fitted black bodice was wrapped in a red satin ribbon before exploding in a cotton candy cocoon of white tulle sprinkled with red and black fabric "rhinestone" appliqués handmade by fabric designer Jocelyn Hines.

This was followed by the aptly-named Golden Luxury, a slinky gold evening gown covered in delicate gold shells that jingle-jangled delicately when the modeled walked. The show came to a fanciful conclusion with Crystal Voluptuousness, a floor sweeping white coat dusted with puffy white 3-D flowers in the same fabric, which the model shrugged off to reveal a matching white strapless column festooned with more 3-D flowers, this time in Crayola bright hues, prompting the audience to hoot and holler its unqualified approval.

It was a Fashion Moment, San Francisco style, and went a long way toward redeeming a week of otherwise middling shows. Let's hope the San Francisco Fashion Week organizers get it together next year and include more designers whose creations actually deserve to be seen on the runway, a la Hurvis, Oda and Quen, rather than showcasing anyone with a sewing machine.

