

From a cheeky gold lame bikini to impeccably cut suits with a neo-1940s spin, Los Angeles Fashion Week Fall 2004, held March 29 to April 2, was a hotbed of style, ranging from the serious to the self-amused.

Produced by 7th on Sixth, the presenters of New York's biannual Fashion Week, together with SmashBox Studios in Culver City — owned by Max Factor heirs Dean and Davis Factor — the week's 46 shows were sponsored by auto giant Mercedes-Benz. Now in its third season, Los Angeles Fashion Week has grown impressively, attracting fashion world heavyweights such as Richard Tyler, Pat Field, Trina Turk and Custo Barcelona, in addition to talented New York-based newcomers Heatherette and local designers both established and emerging.

One of the more obvious differences between Fashion Week in Los Angeles and New York is that the casual aesthetic that pervades the former is apparent in numerous shows in which denim, sweat-suiting and otherwise before-5 looks dominate the runway. At Sanctuary, a slim pea-green velvet pantsuit with shrunken jacket revealing a good four inches of midriff could easily pass for L.A. interview attire.

Frankie B., the designer who popularized alarmingly low-rise jeans, showed hip-chic for both genders, with jeans/blazer/collar-shirt combos for guys, tweaked with billowy Hef-style ascots — which is as fancy as you need to get in L.A., save for Oscar night — and mini-dresses, both sweater-y and denim, for women, worn with fall's alternative to the ubiquitous Ugg Boot: A slouchy suede medium-heeled boot in tobacco or beige that hovers mid-calf.

At swimwear designer Shay Todd's show, sexy bikinis and crystal-buckle-embellished maillots, some shown with knee-high boots — were pure L.A.-meets-the French Riviera.

But there were grown-up clothes, too, some quite remarkable. Here's a capsule of the week's offerings:

• **Lloyd Klein:** Animal prints, big hair and a tribal motif were omnipresent at the first show of the week, with models including 1970s icon Janice Dickinson (also known as the mean female judge on *America's Next Supermodel*) in varying degrees of excess: A cheetah bustier with lime scarlet tulle skirt; a plush, stuffed-animal-of-a-leopard-coat with gnom white fur bow; a steely jacket, appliqued with a metallic

fabric breast plate.

• **Trina Turk:** The sweetheart of Palm Springs chic got in touch with her inner Sloane Ranger, showing Brit-tinged versions of her smart-set looks at her L.A. showroom. Models enacted slice-of-life scenarios — i.e. knitting at home, with one's cat commandeering the ball of yarn — wearing black-and-white tweedy pants paired with a loose mauve cowl-neck sweater or a number of sleek woolen coats of overscaled burgundy houndstooth or autumnal color-blocking.

• **Petro Zillia:** The feminized Anglophile was also an inspiration for popular local designer Nony Tochtermann, who always infuses a bit of circus in her silhouettes. To wit: Flat-front gray trousers with a sheer white menswear-styled shirt and necktie of circus proportions; a striped, wide-lapel jacket with a pink/black blouse and yellow knee-grazing skirt; a sophisticated plaid coat of muted green, blue and yellow. And lots of fedoras, in varying colors.

• **Louis Verdad:** If only the world were as civilized as the woman Louis Verdad aims to dress. Refined glamour worthy of a 1940s starlet is at the heart of this spectacular collection: Fitted ladylike suits; a tweedy oyster-hued bustier with matching wide-legged trousers; even burgundy plaid hot shorts, tempered by a fitted gray jacket, burgundy gloves and sheer burgundy hosiery. For night, there were plenty of sultry black dresses, plus a black-and-white polka-dot flamenco gown with sheer black inset that was nothing short of magical.

• **martinMARTIN:** The husband-wife team of Eric Martin and Diane Moss-Martin produce artistic, intelligent clothing for confident women who view their bodies as canvases. A particularly stunning white cotton shirt with intricate origami-like folds looked like it needed to come with instructions.

• **Heatherette:** Earning an A-plus for sheer exuberance, the Heatherette design team of Richie Rich (a former Icecapades star-turned-New York club kid) and Traver Rains (a former rodeo star) presented the L.A. version of their lively Big Top show with celeb runway vixens Jenny McCarthy, Kimberly Stewart (Rod's daughter), Dita Von Teese (shock-rocker Marilyn Manson's squeeze) and Fox-LA's Jillian Barberie parading the runway in sometimes outrageous party-girl frocks sure to work a photo opp. A two-toned, ocean-blue silk gown with spaghetti straps and a flowing hem was a standout, just this side of demure.

LEATHER AND LACE: Below, Jane's Addiction guitarist Dave Navarro sports a snakeskin jacket and pants with Lord's biker boots. Bottom, a dress by Sue Wong.

