

Chicago Fashion Week surprises critics

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Chicago, IL- Chicago's fashion runways, like so many of the city's airports, may one day land the designer dynamos that set trends from Paris and New York, and highlighting local creations last week was a first take off in that direction.

No one, not even the critics, knew what to expect from local designers at Chicago's first Fashion Week.

What they got was a refreshing look at original pieces that can convert from day to night wear and have that Midwestern style that's not stuck-up, but classy enough to turn heads.

Ladies, we're talking long flowing skirts (some with trains) that move with you. We're talking jersey knits in dark colors, easily packed and unpacked without a wrinkling, and we're talking coverage.

Shawls for fall - Your fall wardrobe won't be complete without a pashmina or thick-wool shawl. The 2006 version has the same stand-alone collar, or cowl neck, as the old-style pieces from last fall, but don't even dare to knot them.

I especially liked Lori Wildman's pieces. She stuck to classic colors and experimented with cuts and design. Her shawl had a Victorian collar with cuff that extended beyond the entire hand. It demanded the spotlight.

These oversized sweaters are designed to wrap - and then some - around your body. They do double-duty as a staple with jeans and boots

Matching made easy - Custo Barcelona brought color to the runway. His designs featured graphic prints on all surfaces. No more plain T-shirts. Every item had a retro-colored enormous print. And don't worry about matching. The Technicolor elements of the pieces make it really easy to dress and go, without thinking twice. It's like the adult version of the mix & match clothing, as evidenced by the embroidered animals.

Guys, the '70s are back. My eyes were distracted by the dizzy prints for the feet that were falling right in front of me. Yes, white disco-era shoes are back. Every male model in the Custo show had on a pair of white shiny shoes. They make for a surprisingly energized look.

To avoid looking like you came from an Easter celebration, try a square-toed version with lighter-colored pants. And remember to walk



Bynum & Bang 2006 Fall-Winter Collection Showcased at the Grand Finale of Chicago Fashion Week

Who's Brittany Spears? This fall, look for the Victorian influences to appear once again with Edwardian elegance and stand-alone collars.

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for running errands, and as a simple addition for evening glamour and warmth.

Another trend is the balloon effect. You're seeing them now with skirts. The material isn't sharply cut at the end; instead it swoops through, creating the balloon skirt.

Now picture this along the hem of a shirt or tube top. Wildman combined her balloon skirts with skinny pants or long, flowing skirts with lots of layers. Bottom line: if you're walking and your clothes aren't moving, you're not fashionable this fall. Nothing is fitted and everything moves - perfect for hiding a little winter weight.

tall; you're essentially trying to pull-off the John Travolta persona.

If you're still thinking summer instead of fall, don't fret. Summer carries into fall this year. Wildman had a lot of shorts to show. They're the type you're seeing in stores now; shorter, with a cuff, but for fall they come in heavier material and colors, including plaid. She paired hers with thigh-high fur leg-warmers, which actually looked absolutely amazing. They were my favorite piece from the whole week. If you can't see yourself wearing them, there are other options, like high boots or fur vests.

The clothes showed style and sophistication, with a hint of edge. In general, the designers kept consumers in mind, Midwest consumers. They created functional pieces for Chicago weather, but gave it that glamour that'll make you anticipate colder weather and make you eager to strut your new looks on the streets.