

back to basics

Outerwear makers stick with the tried and true. **By Kavita Daswani**

WITH REFERENCES VARYING FROM WESTERN FRINGE TO folklore, and textures that flip from short and sheared to rich and lustrous, outerwear vendors are offering plenty of variety to keep economically challenged retailers interested. Producers of coats, capes, jackets, scarves and outerwear accessories at every end of the spectrum are sticking to basic colors of black, beige and navy, but punching up their palettes with of-the-moment colors such as burgundy, plum and berry. Fabrics like suede and pigskin continue to be important for more casual looks, while there appears to still be a market for the high-end chinchillas and minks, rendered in smoky shades of gold and whisky.

"We're introducing a new jacket with a smooth lambskin yoke and bone beads on top of that," said Julie Schroeder, sales and marketing manager of 3B West, a maker of outerwear based in Denver. The brand, which is known for its Western-inspired coats and jackets, is offering a more mainstream version, essentially contemporary skin coats with just a hint of cowgirl.

"We're using primarily suede and pigskin, with embellishments like shells, beads and even some turquoise," said Schroeder, adding that colors like black and cognac are classics but that red is a new seasonal favorite. Silhouettes for the season are more fitted and streamlined in the pigskin, but cowhide leathers are cut roomier. The coats wholesale in the \$60 to \$90 range.

Vendors say colors are one way to rejuvenate a coat line. New York-based Greenlander will be showing coats in what vice president Eldad Cohen described as "Malibu colors" — light pink and blue — for the start of the season. He works largely in wool and nylon, offering junior-inspired looks wholesaling from \$10 to \$18.

"Our new puffer jackets are cut slimmer on the body so they are sexier," he said. Another hot look for the season, the three-quarter length jacket in nylon, sometimes belted, and long-haired wool in classic shades like gray and black. Faux fur linings continue to be popular, said Cohen.

That view was echoed by Amanda Van Rooyen, director of sales at Covington, Ky.-based Donna Salyers' Fabulous Furs, a maker of faux fur coats and accessories.

"We are finding some great new technologies to make the fur as real-looking as possible," she said. That includes ruching on the back of the fake fur, a technique that helps the fabric appear even more fluid. There is also a new fur similar to coyote skin, which Van Rooyen said was in keeping with the "more rustic" direction that fashion was headed. In colors, she singled out black, gray and mustard. Details such as ruffles and tiers will help to update the look, and animal prints are also finding favor on the retail floor. Van Rooyen said shapes run from a full-length hooded coat, which she described as "Aspen-chic," to an above-the-knee stroller length. Wholesale prices start at \$99 and go up to \$260.

That same sort of fun and innovative approach can be seen in real furs and leathers as well, with Montreal, Canada-based Mitchies Matchings offering fluffy rabbit-and-wool scarves in seasonal colors like royal blue and purple.

Owner Mitch Fazekas said handbags in fur and calfskin in black and charcoal are important, but that he "gives a little life to the story with some color" — especially rich, wintry berry shades. Wraps and shawls in cashmere and organza have a luxe look, while he is optimistic about the response to his animal print melange, where numerous prints are mixed together on the same item. The Popcorn scarf — so called because of the weaving together of fur



Fabulous Furs' modacrylic hat.



Donna Salyers' Fabulous Furs' acrylic jacket. Tahari shoes.

and crochet — was a big hit last season, and is being brought back this season in an even greater choice of colors. Prices are \$30 to \$300 at wholesale.

Those who do serious, high-end furs are also revitalizing their offerings with a new palette and textures. Carol Pryhitko, luxury outerwear designer and product developer of Gimpex Ltd. in Toronto, which produces under the Hide Society and Aquilo Amiq labels, said she turned to ancient eras for inspiration. Colors such as gold, pewter, thistle, root, bone and ale will mix with contemporary favorites such as garnet, platinum and ebony, and rock 'n' roll-influenced hues of deep purple and smoke. Lastly, she is bringing in earth-inspired tones of brick, marine, limestone and chlorophyll green.

"Influences are historical and modern," she said. Highlights include a curly lamb coat based on an 18th century captain's coat and fitted silhouettes made from exposed fur skins that draw on vintage Bohemian London looks. Ski jackets come in shearling and are gathered at the sleeves and torsos, while embellishments include metal horse-bits on long fringed belts and ebony wood at the neckline.

At Musi Furs in Toronto, vice president George Musi said the brand's repertoire of sable, chinchilla, beaver and mink look fresh in current in shades such as merlot and deep red.

"Everything is more fitted to the body, and there is a lot of gathering and ruching," he said. Other factors: tapered sleeves, shorter lengths that showcase a great boot, and buckles and buttons made from new materials like bone. Prices are run around \$2,000 wholesale.