

# Top fashion like Russian roulette

He is urbane, charming, witty, and he helps women spend money.

Lots of money — up to \$100,000 per day — just for clothes. Norman Johnson Jr. is the couture import buyer for the 32 Saks Fifth Avenue stores across the United States.

"Buying (or ordering from designers' salons for sale in the stores) these expensive clothes which can cost up to thousands of dollars, is like playing Russian roulette," said Johnson, 54. "Sometimes I think I should go into buying jeans. I have to stop and weigh a lot of things before I plunk down \$5,000 for one outfit. I ask myself, 'Do I stand a chance of selling it? Does it represent some-

thing?'

"I think good buyers have to lead the customer to new trends. And that outfit may be important to have in stock, but it may not sell. A good buyer has to ferret out what is remarkable, new, extraordinary and beautiful. To the buyer's taste, of course. In a sense, I'm imposing my taste on customers."

Those customers don't seem to mind. Johnson tells of the woman from Greece who flew in, spent \$100,000 during one day of shopping, then went home to call up and reorder some of her purchases. She'd given the clothes to relatives, she explained, and needed to replace them.

Couture clothes cost so much (from several hundred dollars up to the thousands) for several reasons, Johnson said. First, good material and workmanship are involved. Second is that "a lot of hands work on that garment before it reaches the consumer. And all the expenses for this, the machinery and the handwork, are increasing.

"When I buy, I look to see that the intrinsic value is there somewhere. But when wool is \$150 to \$200 a yard as it is now, that's expensive. And designers use the very best fabrics.

"I learn every day on this job. Now I'm learning a great deal about fabrics, textiles, weaves, the weight of silk. The more

silk (threads) in a garment, the better it cleans and lasts.

"There is a trend in this country away from heavy clothes. Everyone is traveling, and they want clothes that span the seasons. And there is layering, maybe with a sweater. Sweaters are very important."

Good designers — his favorites are Karl Lagerfeld for Chloe, Emanuel Ungaro, Missoni, Giorgio Armani and St. Laurent (although another buyer buys St. Laurent) — go on for years, he said.

"The late Chanel, for instance, liberated women and put them into soft and comfortable things. She will be with us forever. I'm

very impressed at how copies of her designs go on and on.

"Galanos is an important California designer, and then there are new young designers coming along constantly who must be checked out and encouraged. There is a constant search for a new talent. Roland Klein is an English designer just coming out with his second collection, and I think he is terrific."

There are two types of fashion customers, Johnson believes. "Women who look for investment clothes and do long-term buying and the fashion freak, who likes to look new each season and usually buys more."

Even women with considerable money to spend

on clothing shop from budgets, he says.

"Somewhere there is a figure in their minds, but I like that. It's a challenge to develop workable clothing on a budget."

For himself, he has worked out a wardrobe of navy suit, gray flannel suit, blazer and two pairs of slacks which he replaces as the need arises. And women are getting to dress in a prescribed manner as men do, he believes.

There is no recession in couture buying, he said. Instead, "there is a 30 to 40 percent increase in business which is rather extraordinary. But then business is good for other luxury-type items, too."

## Makeup must be flexible

In each new fashion season, you should update your makeup to complement the new trends.

No matter what the new styles and colors may be, they are only as good as they look on you. The right colors on your face are every bit as important as the colors and styles of your clothing, according to the beauty and fashion experts at L'erin Cosmetics. If the current trend is not for you, then don't detract from your total image by following it.

L'erin experts offer these guidelines to make sure your makeup always looks its best, regardless of what the new fashion and cosmetic trends are.

— Study your face. Look for the attractive qualities. Once you understand your skin and bone structure, you can begin to use makeup effectively.

— Establish a sensible daily regimen by cleaning your face thoroughly before putting on any makeup. Use a cleanser that softens skin as it removes all traces of grime. No makeup will look its best unless your skin is smooth, fresh-looking and blemish-free.

— Apply makeup in a soft, warm shade that complements your skin tone. Foundation helps even out color, and hides skin imperfections.

— Highlight bone structure by using lots of cream or powder blush in a shade that will go with all the new spring colors.

— Accentuate your eyes by following your own eye shape.



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