

Fashion for Eugene

IS MITRA CHESTER ON HER WAY TO FASHION WEEK? by Sheena Lahren

When you hear the name Mitra Chester, you might first think of the co-owner of local resale stores Deluxe and Kitsch, which also sell clothing from local designers. You might recognize Chester as one of a handful of people who organize full-fledged fashion shows in a town that often seems uninterested in fashion. You might know her as the dedicated supporter of fellow local designers. You might think of that one really trendy lady with cute short hair. However, you probably don't think "New York runway designer" — well, at least until recently.

In Fashionably Urban, a fashion show Chester helped organize on Aug. 7, the crowd hooted and hollered as models strutted down the stage in former grandma dresses (those long sleeved, long length shapeless things) that Chester had reconstructed into super-mini, hip, mod dresses. Pushing the edge of Eugene fashion design, which ranges from Birkenstocks to gothic, costume-couture but hardly ever to New-York-runway-esque, the dresses were a take on the 1960s Mod era — a time characterized by a saga of ever-shortening skirts, women with boy-short hair, false eyelashes and lots and lots of amphetamines. When it comes to fashion, think Twiggy.

"I was inspired by 1960s movies like *The Avengers* and *Danger: Diabolik*," Chester says.

Chester, known for both her street-wearable but not high-fashion reconstructions and her decorative, more high fashion designs, such as those displayed in her Renaissance-style wedding or the Gothic-style dresses that have appeared in some of her previous fashion shows, has embarked into a new realm of ready-to-wear high fashion. Remember (or not) Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week 2009 when Lacoste designer Christophe Lemaire brought the 1960s back to sportswear? But Chester doesn't look to high fashion designers such as Lemaire for her designs (and she probably never knew about the Lacoste 2009 sportswear line). They are original in inspiration.

"The 1960s is just a fun era that hasn't



PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

been considered, at least the Mod aspect, as far as I know," Chester says.

Chester plans on continuing to surprise audiences with her ever-changing and evolving designs. "I'm always trying to push forward and expand as a designer," she says. "I got a lot of positive responses [on the Mod pieces] because they were different from what I usually do and what people usually see."

Her runway designs are an expansion of the philosophy of her stores to bring fashion consciousness and availability to Eugene. "Just because we are a small town, doesn't mean we can't have city style," she says.

Of course, while Chester might be growing closer to the designs within the world of Gucci and Nanette Lepore in her "fight to overcome people's natural perception of what we find in Eugene fashion," she says she will *always* support the local economy and use recycled, "green" concepts in her design.

"Environmental consciousness is a logical trend in fashion that is taking place right now," says Chester. "I'm glad it's being supported by the fashion scene, which yields a lot of power."

Chester's next runway designs will debut at her next big fashion show in May 2010.

ew

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