

## SERVICES &amp; MARKETING

## Tokyo Collections pack lively punch

Young designers turn heads with buyers looking to Japan

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Innovative styles and flamboyant productions always make a big impression at the semi-annual Tokyo Collections. But just as important at the recent Autumn/Winter 2004/2005 series of shows was the enthusiasm generated by renewed interest in the event. To the buyers and fashion writers in attendance, the change was unmistakable.

Much to the regret of local organizers, many designers decided in past seasons to show their new creations in Paris and not bother with Tokyo shows. It is a trend that seems to be turning around, however, as the number of overseas brands showing autumn/winter collections in Tokyo rose sharply this year. Also encouraging was the interest that young Japanese designers attracted with their latest ideas.

The fashion parade started at the end of March with an extravaganza featuring eight new Italian designers. Backed by the Italian Trade Commission, the show provided an exciting look at the newest and hottest styles in Italy.

One of those eight designers was Alessandro De Benedetti, a man whose influences include Japanese animation aired on Italian television in the 1970s and the comics of illustrator and writer Go Nagai. The collection's head-turning creations sharply accentuate the lines of the body, an approach in keeping with the designer's motto: "The insatiable pursuit of beauty by modern women." Causing quite a stir were bold prints based on images of plastic surgery.

A decidedly different type of show was held by the Scottish Cashmere Club, a federation of cashmere producers from Scotland. Masayo Urano, who won a competition sponsored by the federation, showed cashmere at its exquisite and expressive best.

Cashmere shows off colors as well as any other material and Urano took

advantage of this quality by using fruit motifs and lively polka dot patterns on a Jacquard weave. The collection was created in partnership with Scottish cashmere factories that go back generations.

Also on display were the fashions of Harmanli, a Turkish producer of fur and leather garments, and Anna Kuczynska of Poland. Working with Japanese designers and marketing experts, the companies developed a presentation that buyers warmed to quickly.

Japanese brands also made a splash during the Tokyo shows, with designers in their 20s and 30s attracting much of the praise. Comfort and elegance are among the aspects that make their styles so appealing.

"Adult-oriented clothes that would be out of place on real grown-ups," is how the creators of the Frabois brand like to describe their fashions. Popular ever since debuting in 2001, the line created by Eri Utsumi is designed to surprise and delight with original shapes and details. A typical example of the Frabois style is a loose-fitting top decorated with large flower prints, matched with similarly ample trousers.

Limi Yamamoto of LIMI feu, which operates 15 outlets nationwide, showed exceedingly beautiful clothes that were almost extreme in their simplicity. Attention is drawn to cut and line by using a simple set of colors. Yamamoto also made her styles just a little more feminine and gentle than usual.

The TOGA collection from Yasuko Furuta included garments made of foil print and other glitter materials. Furuta gave a human touch to her futuristic styles by matching skirts and dresses made of synthetic materials with washed-out woolen tops and cozy knitwear.

"Black" was the theme for the collection by Han Ahn-soon, whose brand carries her name. Many of Han's charming clothes featured delicate ruffled work and sequins to give them an unmistakably feminine air.

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Clockwise from top left: an outfit from designer Alessandro De Benedetti; a piece from the Scottish Cashmere Club; feminine charm in black from Han Ahn-soon; a typical example of the Frabois style; an outfit by Limi Yamamoto of LIMI feu shows her extreme simplicity; and a TOGA outfit from Yasuko Furuta.