

CALVIN KLEIN'S CHOICE/2 ARMANI EARNINGS UP 14%/2

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WWD WEDNESDAY

Sportswear

Mellow Yellow

NEW YORK — Look on the bright side. Designers are eschewing fall's traditional earth tones in favor of lively colors in the form of flirty florals, fine-striped knits and bold paisley prints. Here, for example, C. Ronson's silk, cashmere and nylon sweater and Mint's silk chiffon skirt, photographed at BLVD. For more, see pages 8 and 9.



COMPLIMENTS OF WWD

Silver Lining, Gray Clouds: Levi's Improves but Outlook Gloomy

By Scott Malone

NEW YORK — Phil Marineau's latest nightmare is \$3 a gallon gas prices.

The president and chief executive officer of Levi Strauss & Co. has been struggling to right the ship of

the world's leading jeans brand, which has seen seven consecutive

Paul Charron on Claiborne and the Family of Brands/15

years of sales declines. With Levi's reporting a 9.7 percent first-quarter sales increase and a narrowed loss, Marineau said Tuesday he is well aware that he's trying to turn things

See Levi's, Page 20

Technology

If We Can Build It, Will They Wear It?

By Cate T. Corcoran and Miles Socha

NEW YORK — Right now, the look on the runways is more high housewife than high tech, but don't let that fool you: Technology is an increasingly important influence in fashion design. Maybe that's what Muccia Prada was thinking when she married the romantic with the futuristic in her spring and fall collections for Miu Miu and Prada, which included prints inspired by the 18th century, robot appliques and quirky intarsia motifs reminiscent of Eighties video game icons.

The fact is, what's high tech these days doesn't always look it. The biggest change technology has wrought on fashion design is that now mass market companies such as H&M and Zara can turn out the latest trends quickly and cheaply, thanks to inexpensive air travel and communications. New machines have made possible new finishes and decorative techniques even if the results, such as romantic embroideries and laser cuts reminiscent of Elizabethan-era slashes, look the very opposite of high tech.

Technology also increasingly influences fashion design in more obvious ways: Levi Strauss & Co. now has its own research and development department, as do some activewear companies. There are new consulting firms, such as Italy's Grado Zero Espace, that are ready to research and adapt high tech for clothing design. At the very high end of the fashion world, particularly in the couture, designers have always embraced the high tech and the handmade equally. Both are means to the end of creating something that hasn't been seen before.

"Technology is at the basis of my whole work in all its different applications," said Muccia Prada, whose company is as famous for its high tech jackets as its dressmaker details. "It can mean avant-garde, as demonstrated by our highly technological epicenter stores of New York, Tokyo and the forthcoming Los Angeles, and by our strong attitude toward revolutionary materials used for clothing and accessories.

"But it can also mean jumping into the past [and] revitalizing the old-time manual techniques," such as dyeing. Prada made tie-dye and ombre look new when she combined them together in sweaters and billowy Fifties-style skirts for spring.

Karl Lagerfeld said fashion may have recently been stuck in a "flea market" period of retro interpretations, but he asserted that it's vital to stay in touch with technological developments on all fronts, from personal electronics to the latest knitwear machines.

"One has to," he said in his rapid-fire way. "We all have our eyes open in all areas." For example, Lagerfeld last year converted his collection of 60,000 compact discs to an iPod storage system, with players installed throughout his homes. "They completely changed the way people approach music," he said. The technology also inspired him to create iPod carrying cases for Fendi, and he allowed that their shape and materials could also be inspiring for fashion in general.

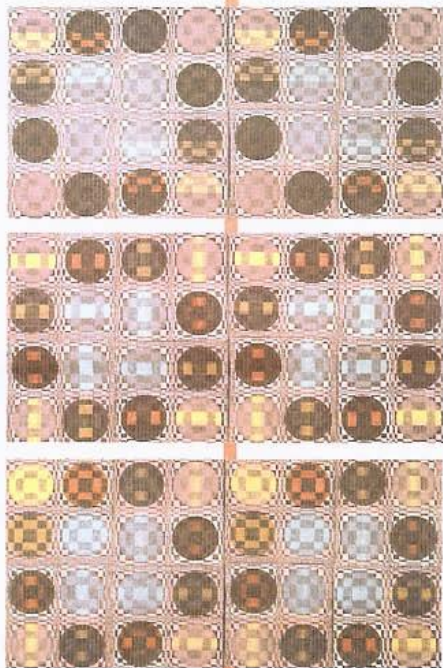
Famous for paying no excess reverence to the past, Lagerfeld recently explored never-before-seen combinations of fur and plastic at Fendi and showed high tech skiwear as part of his Chanel and Lagerfeld Gallery collections.

He stressed that the hand of technology is not always obvious in fashion. The designer praised recent developments in knitwear that allow him to create "unbelievable" colors and patterns that appear as if they were printed. "Don't ask me how the machines work," he said. "But this is part of our job to go with the times. Otherwise, we are not in fashion and we might as well be organic farmers."

Lagerfeld noted that technology must also be used to renew low tech aspects of fashion, citing such innovations as laser-cutting of leather, which makes lacy patterns and other effects possible.

"This is what I'm interested in: things that give you a capacity of making things we weren't capable of doing before," he said. "We should not try to escape the world."

Hussein Chalayan's Airplane Dress is constructed of fiberglass, with movable panels that resemble airplane flaps.



This handwoven textile by Maggie Orth, top, changes color and pattern over time, center and bottom.

Designer Hussein Chalayan is known for his fascination with technology — from airplanes to computers — and his use of high tech materials and forms. His Memory Wire Dress contains metal coils that expand and change the shape of the dress when the wearer operates a remote control. His Airplane Dress will be exhibited along with other clothing and accessories that straddle the boundaries of art, technology and fashion April 17-28 in the futuristic Selfridges store in Birmingham, England, as part of a digital expo called the Feed Festival.

Also on display will be handwoven fabric panels whose patterns and colors change from one minute to the next. The textiles were woven from cotton and conductive yarn by artist Maggie Orth, founder and chief executive officer of International Fashion Machines of Cambridge, Mass. They are also printed with inks that change colors. The panels are flexible but require an electricity source, and are available by special order from the company, which also makes fabric light switch-

es. In 2001, IFM created a handbag trimmed with an animated flower, but found that at the time, fashion companies were reluctant to adopt the technology because it added too much expense to the cost of a garment (\$14, in this case).

"People's imaginations just aren't there yet," said Orth, who has an art degree from the Rhode Island School of Design and a PhD in Media Arts and Sciences from MIT's Media Lab. "I was always interested in challenging the boundaries of what art was. I was looking for materials that would be very immediate and give me the satisfaction of being an artist, and would let me explore electronics and computation, as well."

Artists aren't the only ones influencing the convergence of tech and fashion. Levi Strauss and activewear companies such as Burton Snowboards and O'Neill Inc. were among the first to experiment with high tech means of incorporating new functionality into clothing. Last year, Burton started selling the

Continued on page 14

Technology

If We Can Build It, Will They Wear It?

Continued from page 12

\$499 Amp jacket, which has a pocket for an iPod and a soft, flexible control panel mounted on its washable Gore-Tex sleeve. Snowboarders can listen to thousands of songs while they slip down the slopes without ever having to remove their gloves or unzip anything. The European division of O'Neill has said it plans to sell a similar jacket this fall that will work with MP3 players and cell phones. Levi Strauss' R&D department is just over two years old, and the team of six explore new fabrics and designs that help make its customers'

waists, Tulin said.

Typically, functional innovations in apparel, such as fabrics that resist staining, find their way into men's clothing first, Tulin noted. Men like gadgets, and the idea of clothing that "performs" like a machine appeals to them. Dockers' Stain Defender, Wrinkle Defiance and the forthcoming odor-resistant Refresh Action and Cool Effects wicking technology metaphorically gird men for modern battle, though in truth, the worst danger they're likely to encounter is spilling coffee on their laps while commuting in the Chevy Suburban. Women, on the other hand, are primarily interested in

“Tech is everywhere around us in everything that we do, from homes to cell phones, so why wouldn't it emerge in apparel, as well?”

— Kris Tulin, Levi Strauss & Co.

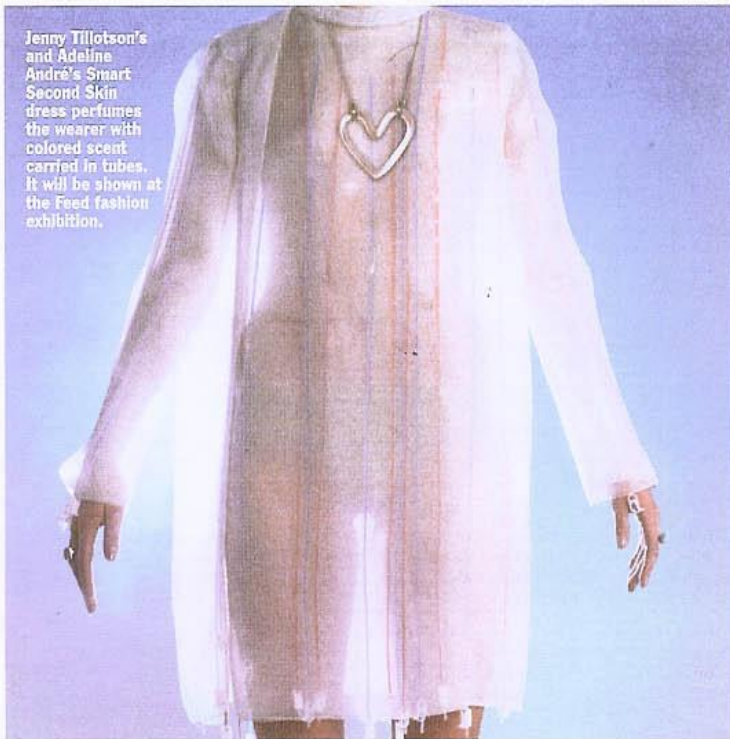
lives easier and more convenient.

"Tech is everywhere around us in everything that we do, from homes to cell phones, so why wouldn't it emerge in apparel, as well?" asked Kris Tulin, senior director of advanced innovations for Levi Strauss and the former head of design for Dockers for women. Technology became a conscious attribute of the Dockers brand in 2001 when the company introduced the Mobile Pant, which had hidden pockets to accommodate the gadgets men were strapping to their

style, though Levi Strauss has found that they, too, are receptive to anything that makes their lives easier and more convenient. Stain Defender, for example, has been a boon to working mothers who frequently contend with sticky little fingers tugging at their pant legs, said Tulin.

"With women, first and foremost, style is what matters," Tulin said. "But then we can augment that and help simplify their lives by incorporating technology in their apparel that provides a benefit and gives them more time and helps them look good at the same time."

Jenny Tilgotson's and Adeline André's Smart Second Skin dress perfumes the wearer with colored scent carried in tubes. It will be shown at the Feed fashion exhibition.



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Levi Strauss wouldn't reveal what the future might hold for Dockers, but some day we might see garments that incorporate devices into their fibers so the two become one, said Andrew Caley Chetty, curator of the Feed fashion exhibition. Other innovations might include animated designer logos and strapless sports bras that tighten up when they sense stress, said Bradley Quinn, author of the book "Techno Fashion."

Because technology is more pervasive, accessible and affordable than it used to be, more designers and artists — not just scientists — are experimenting with it, said Chetty. But it's always been an important influence on fashion, he added, citing the raincoat as an example. That wonder was made possible by the waterproofing process that chemist Charles Macintosh invented in 1823.

But not every designer and manufacturer can afford to experiment with the latest innovations, and many lack in-house technical expertise. Take Joanna Baum, for example. Her full-time job is designing garments fashioned out of vintage clothing for her own boutique, called Sir, which is located on Brooklyn's newly stylish Atlantic Avenue. She also consults for a soon-to-launch men's golf apparel maker, which is considering using stain-resistant fabrics to differentiate its shirts.

"It would be interesting to combine Gore-Tex with a tweed," she said. "My freelance work is completely different, and sometimes I think it would be fun to blend these things together." But it's unlikely to happen any time soon because high tech fabrics would add too much cost to a garment, and her small business doesn't have access to factories and chemicals. Plus, she added, her customer is attracted to things with a handmade, individual feel. Not everything Sir sells is unique or crafted from vintage, but most of it retails for between \$30 and \$200.

While men may choose a plain \$8 golf shirt with stain-resistant fabric over an identical one without it, for women, the lure of technology is much less straightforward. Levi Strauss has, however, discovered what makes women loyal to a brand, and it's not technology, said Patti Sircus Bender, the company's senior marketing manager. In fact, it's something quite old-fashioned: a flattering fit.

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