Pullout guide to week two of the Chicago International Film Festival

Twenty-six designers who are making local fashion matter

smoke ‘em while you can

cigars • imported cigarettes
humidors • pipes • lighters • zippo

silver is at a 20-year high

necklace • ring • pin • watch •
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Pullout guide to week two of the Chicago International Film Festival

Plus

Partying with the baby moguls. Cox on the Sox, old-school Italian dining, Freakwater, a good time to buy Derek Webster’s art, and more

Twenty-six designers who are making local fashion matter

halloween 365-days-a-year

vintage cloth

> military
> western
> etc

play dirty

maid • cop
fire lady • nun
cheerleader
hooker
school girl

resolution 2 revolution

PLUS
Chicago has a great music scene and a great theater scene; our comedy scene is like a Saturday Night Live farm. In the culinary department lately, the eyes of the world are on us. And hey, if you believe the sloganeers at the Chicago International Film Festival, we’re the Film Capital of the World. But no one has ever even pretended that we’re anywhere near the cutting edge when it comes to fashion.

But the city’s full of people who are ready to take us there, people working around the lack of infrastructure and in spite of the inattentive national fashion press. This usually quiet activity has bubbled to the surface recently, as Mayor Daley announced the first-ever city-sponsored fashion event, the 11-day Fashion Focus Chicago. The Apparel Industry Board launched an eight-week seminar series on business savvy in fashion design and sponsored a two-day high-end fabric and trim sale. The Chicago Fashion Foundation hosted two discussions on the importance of color. Marshall Field’s threw a cluster of parties, including the grand opening of a temporary in-house boutique featuring Chicago designers. And Gen Art capped things off with its annual Fresh Faces fashion show, a ritzy runway soiree featuring six local designers, all of whom are featured in this issue.

In this issue we’re highlighting clothing and accessories designers who live, work, and sell their wares in town—some of them even run the shops. If you want to see their designs in person, consult our handy list of the stores that carry their wares (page 28)—or check the List on the cover of Section 2 to see where some of them will be showcasing their stuff this week.
SYNDROME | With racks of clothing under track lighting in the front and a computer station in the back, the main room of Syndrome's basement-level headquarters has a bat-cave vibe, like if you pulled a lever a vault would open up and reveal a factory full of busy Oompa Loompas. In fact there is a back room, stocked with a dozen or so sewing machines, a screen-printing station, and rolls upon rolls and stacks upon stacks of folded-up fabric. They need it all on-site: if Syndrome proprietor Luke Cho and right-hand man Adam Rajcevich rarely make patterns from the ground up anymore, instead selecting from the 400 they have on file, tweaking a seam or a collar, and then plugging in fabrics, buttons, snaps, zippers, patches, linings, and the other particulars that make each item unique. Last year's outerwear jacket, for example, got epaulets and a deeper pocket. The best thing about Syndrome is this focus on details: buttons sewn on by hand, a slighty offset zipper, perfectly placed unfinished seams, and impeccable printing in water-based ink, "so it breathes better," says Cho. Even the insides of the garments are totally thought-out, with contrasting or complementary linings and piping. The hip, low-key men's label combines aspects of military uniforms, fatsigues, and skatewear and isn't afraid to get a little feminine: flower prints and polka dots show up quite often, as does the color pink. A supersoft blue-gray hoodie is printed with a cable-knit pattern just like grandma used to make, and bright orange whipstitching on unfinished seams. 'You get to make the final call on what kind of thing it is," she says. LA | Penelope's

BRUISER | Designing clothing, says Shirley Novak, is "almost like making costumes for moods." Her cheeky Bruiser label has strong themes and expressive signature pieces—the fall/winter 2004 line, Urban Piracy, for example, included a floaty chiffon "pirate ghost dress" with a silver sequin applique anchor. Last season, the short-sleeved keyhole sweater coat had a puffy applique heart on the front and lungs on the back, a gold-and-pink tulle overlay, and bright orange whipstitching on unfinished seams. Like many of her items, it snaps up the sides, engineered for ease. Every piece in her current line, Correspondent, was designed so she could ride her bike in it, including long, stretchy cotton twill cropped pants with pin-tucked seams. Her versatile chiffon "karate shirt" has a waist sash and a long slit that can be worn in back or front, her "flexible jumpsuit," made from heavy stretch jersey, comes with flirty short shorts and can be worn long like a dress or scrunched up around the waist for a sassier look. "You get to make the final call on what kind of thing it is," she says. LA | Penelope's

DI-O | Who knows what kind of climate you’d wear an open-backed sweater vest in, but if you find yourself there, poet and performance artist Dione “Brownskin” Fraser-Carter and Underground Railroad rapper Nicole Howell—together the crochet team DI-O—have just the thing. Their soft, springs creations include hot pants, jump-suits, bridal gowns, and bikinis, halter, and tube tops, plus designs that can’t be categorized, like a one-armed tunic that looks like a shapeless tablecloth from the back and a slitty little top from the back or a one-legged pantsuit with a midriff-baring short-sleeved sweater and matching armbands. Fraser-Carter and Howell go nuts with woven and shrugs.

Adam Rajcevich and Luke Cho in the "bat cave"
JILL ALBERTS | American politics teacher turned jewelry designer Jill Alberts threads twinkle faceted gold beads into mesh and delicate lace patterns that appear to unravel at the edges. Though she also scavenges the good parts from vintage to create pretty/tough one-of-a-kind pieces, her ruffly lariats, double-helix earrings, and spiderweb bracelets are most distinctive. LA | Chicago Designer Shop at Marshall Field’s, Helen Yi, Material Possessions

LEE ALLISON | Novelty ties used to be tacky polystyrene things with drawings of pizzas or scenes from Star Wars on them, and that was fine, because novelty ties were solely for that one wacky guy in sales, then. The dot-com revolution made it OK for management to be goofy, so now there are things like Lee Allison’s finely crafted ties with skull and cigar motifs rendered in custom-woven silk from England—simultaneously whimsical and elitist. Allison also makes vests and skirts in more sober designs. LA | Apartment no. 9, Shirts on Sheffied, leaning; Vincent & Hill, W Retail Gift Shop

ORLANDO ESPINOZA | Orlando Espinoza likes to see women slim, elegant, a bit formal, and in muted colors, especially black. Though many of his designs seem prim from a distance, up close you can see that he’s kind of a perv: a modest long-sleeved top with a rounded ruched panel has a terry slit at the sternum; a flat-front skirt cut on the bias gathers slightly at the occochee; a tank dress looks rather conventional from the front, but the back is open down to there. LA | Chicago Designer Shop at Marshall Field’s, Jake

SHANE GABIER | Shane Gabier has always taken a pointedly contemporary approach to designing his meticulously constructed garments. But his fall line, with its massive blanket-wrapped serpents in saturated burnt sienna and vibrant pinks, was inspired by a visit to the Field Museum’s Native American collections.

“Looking at what was there before Chicago made me reexamine what’s been left behind,” he says. His upcoming spring collection evokes Edwardian parlor games, but with an unexpectedly voluptuous slant. Gabier’s blossoming ornamental sensibility is manifest in details like pictures of cut-jet bracelets printed on the cuffs of a beige or the dark cotton gauntlet delineating a seam. Prim pin tucks cascade down the bodice of a dress unanchored by a traditional yoke, and a simuous arch of sateen frames the shoulder blades on a jacket, creating crests that invite one to slip a hand inside. KS | P.45

JACKIE KILMER | The designer also known as Mississippi catfishing intersects at exactly one point: Jackie Kilmer, the designer of simple architectural forms that let the materials—silk or silver—shine through. Though her signature lariats, double-helix earrings, and spiderweb bracelets are most distinctive.

Accessories

GILLION CARRARA | As a professor at the School of the Art Institute and director of its Fashion Resources Center, Carrara has been grooming young designers for almost 20 years. Her own jewelry designs are simple architectural forms that let the materials—silk or silver—shine through. Though her signature lariats, double-helix earrings, and spiderweb bracelets are most distinctive.

MERA NAAM | April Krieger, who grew up around a Devon Avenue, collects vintage beads and semiprecious stones for her Indiana-inspired jewelry line: a chain of black onyx and wooden beads is anchored by a cameo of the elephant god Ganesh, cloisonne beads dangle from a delicate gold chain that rests on the collarbone, and ornate round earrings drip with freshwater pearls. HK | Exhibit, Silver Moon

TOKI COLLECTION | Toni Kim got her law degree three years ago from Chicago-Kent, but instead of practicing law she makes feather-light chains of finely ribbed links that burst with happy bundles of semiprecious stones. Berries on a vine, waterfalls, roots, and other organic shapes influence her cascading necklaces and chandelier earrings, which have a disheveled, almost tangled-looking softness. KS | P.45

LARA MILLER | Each piece in Miller’s knitwear line can be entered from multiple openings, giving a simple pullover numerous fits and looks. The Chicago-born designer likes to play with “the way geometric forms are transformed by the body,” but she also harbors larger ambitions. “If I can get people to think differently about something as regimented as how they get into their clothes,” she says, “maybe they can open up continued on page 26
More like belts than sport-utility items, Pasek’s “hip huggers,” as she calls them, are flat envelopes or Friar Tuck-esque drawstring pouches made of glitzy upholstery fabric or sturdy cotton twill and attached to matching thin belts. Pasek, who worked at F45 for four and a half years and is currently employed as a preschool teacher, is best known for her sweet, handmade stretch jersey dresses trimmed with lace and topped with crepe-back satin bows. She plans to butch it up a little for fall and winter, and “ant epidemic” with his men’s clothing line, Bynum & Bang. The insects are hand-painted on the linings of his jackets; painted ants adorned with black crystals crawl up the leg of a pair of jeans; plain printed critters branching up from a group of blossoms; branching off into a black flower print and a tissue-thin orange cashmere sweater. “Fabric almost tells me what it wants to be,” he says. He buys up patterns that are “too beautiful to leave at the mill” and has had vintage fabric re-created. Every man, says Narinskiy, should have a good suit made out of quality wool, and none of this polyester-lining business—Bynum’s linings are all silk charmeuse. Nielsen makes those too. MR

PASSEK | No, a wedding, and he looks just awesome. That’s because every guy looks ten times better in a suit, and “back when” — let’s say from the mid-40s to the mid-60s — was the golden age of men’s suits. Nielsen’s designs work within the suits-and-shirts repertoire of the classic haberdasher, with subtle tweaks to remind us that we’re in the here and now. The slim, tailored lines of his jackets and shirts are all postwar urbanity, but not even the most fashion-forward men of the time could handle one of his overblown pink-on-pink paisley ties. The 21st-century dude may be unprepared for the return of the cummerbund, but, just in case, Nielsen makes those too. MR

PASEK | Everyone’s got a picture of their grandpa from back when, all turned out in a suit and tie for a date or a job or a wedding, and he looks just awesome. That’s because every guy looks ten times better in a suit, and “back when” — let’s say from the mid-40s to the mid-60s — was the golden age of men’s suits. Nielsen’s designs work within the suits-and-shirts repertoire of the classic haberdasher, with subtle tweaks to remind us that we’re in the here and now. The slim, tailored lines of his jackets and shirts are all postwar urbanity, but not even the most fashion-forward men of the time could handle one of his overblown pink-on-pink paisley ties. The 21st-century dude may be unprepared for the return of the cummerbund, but, just in case, Nielsen makes those too. MR

BRIGHTON PARK PRESS | BPF’s got lots of the clean, tame Illustrator-looking styles that you find in almost any indie T-shirt line. What sets it apart are the shirts it designs for charities, with the profits going there too. | Dressing Room, Guine, Penelope’s

DUMPLERDIVIDE | If you pass by the Damen Blue Line stop you’ll occasionally encounter Alex Narinskiy’s hectic collection of recycled tees emblazoned with contrasting cutsouts of bats and giraffes. He says he plans to have a Web site up (“people can just google DumperDivide clothing”) by the time it’s too cold to sell outdoors.

| "IMPERFECT ARTICLES" | Noah Singer and Matt Andrews curate designs by visual artists from all over the country. Some are cutely; more sophisticated standouts include Maya Hayuk’s, with a Native American totem necklace printed around the neck. | Penelope’s

| "TEETSY" | Graphic-design designs from a group of young graphic designers, on cotton shirts from Fruit of the Loom and American Apparel. A black tee with stylized cherry blossoms branching up from the hem is particularly sharp. | teetsey.com

THREADLESS | Anyone can post designs on threadless.com for visitors to vote on. The top designs each week get made into shirts for sale, and the designers get $1,000 in cash and store credit. Nice to see democracy at work. | threadless.com

PEELOUT | Sarah Staszkunas is busy: she co-owned the now-defunct vintage boutique Hot Damn, fronts bands (the Camaro Rouge), tends bar (the Hideout), paints houses, and raised a son solo for more than a decade. For 25 years, through all of this, she’s been designing clothes, though till recently her distinctive wares

continued on page 28
Veteran designer Robin Richman reopened her eponymous Bucktown boutique in late September, to the relief of her dedicated fans—after a mind-blowing sale in June, she'd closed for most of the summer to remodel and add a men's department. The store, which began as a showcase for her innovative hand-knit garments, has grown into a showcase and workshop for other couturiers as well. Her own fall line, in a light, warm blend of wool and slubby silk, includes an ingenious pair of sweater sleeves, connected across the upper back, in stripes of variegated brick red; it's cozier than arm warmers alone but more interesting than a shrug. And for men she's got simple pullovers with intarsia color fields in eggplant, charcoal, and pale green; the irregularities in the hand-dyed fibers lend the Rothko-like forms depth and texture.

Richman's store is a design feat in itself. She worked closely on the expansion and renovation with architect Julie Florh, whom she first encountered as a customer. "She bought one of the quirkiest pieces I've had—a great Gary Graham winter coat—and we just built a relationship from there. When I decided to redesign the store, I thought immediately of her." Florh's floor plan opens the shop up despite the substantial increase in inventory, and her lighting scheme is a smartly functional mix of warm and cool; exposed fluorescent tubes contrast with the diffuse glow from vintage French porthole lamps. Sculptural steel frames by Florh suspend panels of linen to create cabanlike dressing rooms.

Richman has retooled her collections, dropping some lines and buying deeper groups of others. Hussein Chalayan, Antipast, Rozae Nichols, and the Belgian line Just in Case are all well represented. Her choices tend to be sophisticated but spirited. "I just have a different taste than what I see out there," says Richman. "There are so many stores now selling T-shirts and jeans, and I just want to keep my focus on what I like." But there are great casual items too: soft T-shirts with daydream imagery from Kiyomi Kimball, who manages the menswear department, as well as Hannoh knits reminiscent of 1920s Chanel sportswear. Another Richman protege, Tania Bowers, back from her native Australia for a stint as in-house accessory designer, is offering a series of brooches, mysterious insect forms mummified in silk and metallic threads. In footwear, classical forms are fine-tuned for currency, from Chie Mihara's elegant flats and boots in sumptuous deep-grained leather to Mansell's metallic slate wing tips. The new men'swear collection is of a piece with the women's, both in its attention to inventive construction and in its stable of designers, which includes Hannoh and James Coviello. The shop is also carrying Walter Van Beirendonck's entire line, only the second shop in the U.S. to do so. Van Beirendonck's hats embody his absurdist sense of humor: a lumberjack's hat is fashioned of carpet, a woolen flight cap has a contrasting yarn fauxhawk. A man with quieter tastes might prefer Marc Le Bihan's handsome black wool pea coat, with its imaginative cut and patinated gunmetal tanks at the lapels. Men's accessories are anchored by Brussels's surreal haberdasher Christophe Coppens. Buttery suede gloves are tipped in glossy black leather, as if they'd been dipped in shiny paint, and belts are buckled by patinated brass castings of facial features. Richman also offers vintage Halliburton luggage, velvet bow ties, and Jas-MB bags in cracked or chalk-stripe-patterned leather, all of which are just as likely to be snapped up by female customers.

Richman says the expansion isn't just about business—she's got other motives as well. "I love the way men dress in Europe and New York, and you just don't see that here," she says. "I want to see men express themselves in a different way." KS | Robin Richman
DORIS RUTH | Allie Adams's line of vintage-inspired clothing, named after her grandmother, is two and a half years old, but Adams didn't quit her full-time job as a writer for a brokerage firm until this past August. Nights, weekends, and perhaps the occasional hour of company were devoted to her collection, full-on feminine clothes informed by the hourglass silhouettes, full-on feminine clothes — peplum waists but wide-open necklines, puff sleeves but open-slit elbows — and shortening the petticoat to just above the knee, decorating it with hankie-esque appliques and piecing of all kinds sheZeroes square of kiosky, 1940s-inspired high-waisted pants and shorts, and the Zipperall, a body-conscious quilted-cotton snow-gathered cuffs to keep out the Chicago winds.

KATRIN SCHNABL | People are asymmetrical, says Katrin Schnabl, and that's why her clothes tend to have uneven hems and diagonal draping; one shoulder of a jersey knit top hangs lower than the other so the fabric ripples across the body. Many of her pieces are also inside-out or back-to-front reversible, like a black shirt with three-quarter-length sleeves and a pink lining or a top called the Torque, made of a single piece of silk charmeuse crisscrossed across the back (or front). Last year Schnabl, who was born in Germany and lived in New York for 17 years, holding down gigs as a designer, illustrator, and product manager, was offered a job teaching fashion design, construction, and illustration at the School of the Art Institute. "I was really ready to leave New York—the space, the pressure, the time pressure, the life pressure," she says. "I didn't want to get old there." HK | Sara Jane

michelle tan | Michelle Tan, who’s in dozens of high-end boutiques in New York and California but only one in Chicago, is generally right in step with whatever’s going on—she did the bolo gypsy thing for the last couple seasons, just like everyone else—but she’s gotten a little bolder with her forthcoming 2006 spring/summer line, opening up Victorian-inspired shapes—peplum waists but wide-open necklines, puff sleeves but open-slit elbows—and shortening the petticoat to just above the knee, decorating it with hankie-esque appliques and piecing of all kinds sheZeroes square of kiosky, 1940s-inspired high-waisted pants and shorts, and the Zipperall, a body-conscious quilted-cotton snow-gathered cuffs to keep out the Chicago winds.

WEFT BY JILLIAN GRYZLAK | Recent Art Institute grad Gryzlak says her favorite part of designing is the “process of play”—when her mind gets snagged by something she immerses herself in researching it. A recent collection was inspired by mail-order houses, native to Australia and New Guinea, which build elaborately decorated dwellings to attract mates. Torn-looking strips of fabric sewn onto the front of a jacket mimics the archetypal structures the birds build out of twigs and grass, and hanging buttons suggest the birds’ collections of colorful found objects. A pair of quilted men’s pants bears patterns, reminiscent of aboriginal paintings, that show “X-ray” views of animals. Gryzlak’s clothes look worn, in both senses, with frayed edges and bulging pockets; she’s been known to toss items onto her heater and whittle her own buttons. “Something stark and new doesn’t fit with what I’m doing right now,” she says. HK | Penelope’s

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