

His clothes are like wearing Breughel painting

By RUSTLE SHAND

Like the sloe gin of his native Netherlands, Koos van den Akker's clothes can become an addiction.

Among the van den Akker collectors who came to Bonwit Teller's S'fari Room in Somerset Mall last week were Diane Grant of Bloomfield Hills and Barbara Bernstein from Windsor.

"Koos' clothes are fun, romantic and story bookish," said Ms. Bernstein. "His clothes are so luxurious. It's like wearing a painting. They make me feel like a collage on legs."

Ms. Grant agreed that van den Akker's clothes are "like wearing a piece of art," adding, "They are different from other clothes because they are so artistic. I collect them, and like all good works of art, they never go out of style."

Like his native drink van den Akker's clothes have a rich peasant



flavor that is not Russian but Dutch. Still, the suggestion that he is inspired by the current peasant furor fails to rattle the cheery, ebullient designer.

"I'd be honored to be influenced by Yves Saint Laurent. But the fact is, I've been obsessed with Dutch country costumes ever since I can remember. I've been designing sophisticated versions of them since I was about 16."

He is now 38.

"THEIR WONDERFUL" appliques of cotton prints on very rich fabrics, their marvelous quilting and the overtones of Oriental colorings and gold braid aren't a bit Russian," he said. "The cuts and all go much farther back in time, to the 15 and 16th centuries."

In the nine years since he arrived in New York with \$18 and a portable sewing machine, van den Akker has progressed. In the early days of his career, he made \$10, one of-a-kind dresses on a sewing machine propped on a board laid over his bed in a rooming house.

Today, he owns his own exclusive dress shop and wholesale business in the multi-million volume area.

Located in Madison Avenue's golden half-mile (65th Street to 72nd Street) his shop is a pulse point for many elegant people, among them Nan Kempner, Brooke Hayward and Nancy Ittelson.

His collections are sold nationwide as well as in his own shop.

Van den Akker's spring clothes are like the Dutch landscape—a carpet of flowers. Giant arabesques of massed-flowered cotton form the designer's characteristic collages on the full, rounded or sheer waiting skirts and dresses. Skirts and little open jackets are teamed with flamboyantly sexy blouses with huge sleeves, many ruffles or deeply revealing necklines.

DRAWSTRINGS THAT exercise only the vaguest control over slippery necklines and also pull skirts into a drape at the side, a la Breughel and Vermeer, give picturesque interest to the clothes.

Van den Akker's clothes are almost never long, however formal. But there is a sexy fanfare of petticoats or a drift of sheer panel skirts to dramatize the evening clothes.

Pure linen that "wrinklelike hell" is a favorite luxury in the van den Akker collection. He mixes linen with lace insertions in a bolero jacket and adds a ruffled chiffon blouse. There are also flower ribbon edges to his double coat with a big ruffled collar.

colors, including browns with gold and cranberry.

He predicts unconstructed mohair coats in sharp colors, such as red, with collages.



Koos van den Akker's fans say his clothes can become an addiction. He claims that his designs are influenced by Dutch country costumes and are not influenced by the current peasant furor.



Koos' textured all cotton pull-over top, with collage swirl skirt (left), is \$150. The heavy linen wrap skirt with quilted collage jacket is \$285. Devotees say his fashions are like wearing a piece of art.

"I'm romantic. I can't help it."

"Fall will be a season of things you can mix with what you already have in your wardrobe."

— Koos van den Akker



Koos achieves his collages by teaming a floral chiffon two-layer skirt with a chiffon and lace blouse (left) at \$460. His double skirt has a draped side. Combined with hawking silk and lace blouse the outfit is a collector's item that costs \$760.

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Where It's At

By JUDY SOLOMON

Getting personal

Just in time for April showers (the bridal kind, that is), here's a great gift. It's a name silhouette featuring full length figures of a man and a woman facing each other. The letters of the bride's first name form the face and bonnet, the letters of her middle name form the bodice and the letters of her last name form the hoop skirt. The gentleman's name is spelled out in a comparable way. Done in India ink by Sharon Daitch, the 9-by-12-inch framed picture costs \$30 and orders take two weeks. Other sizes and variations are also available. Plaza Suite, 29113 Northwestern Highway at Twelve Mile, Southfield, 357-1121.



Cheers!

If you love books and Britain, you're going to love these two utterly charming paperbacks by New Yorker Helene Hanff. "84, Charing Cross Road" records Ms. Hanff's actual correspondence with an English bookshop over a period of 20 years. As the books and letters crossed the Atlantic, a wonderful personal relationship developed between the two parties. The sequel, "The Duchess of Bloomsbury Street" describes Ms. Hanff's eventual visit to England. Each costs \$2.50. You can read both books in an evening and you're guaranteed to smile the whole way through. The Birmingham Bookstore, 263 Pierce, Birmingham, 642-4404.



French dressing

How sweet they are! Little busy sundresses made in France in the very same style that the big ladies wear. Featuring a shirred yoke at the top, the sundresses are 65 per cent polyester and 35 per cent cotton. Two patterns are available: a delicate old-fashioned flowered print or a muted madras-type plaid. In stock in infant sizes 6, 12, or 18 months, as well as toddler sizes 2 and 4, the price ranges from \$14 to \$19.50. Pumpkins and Monkeys at Claire Pearone, Somerset Mall, Troy, 643-0770.



If the shoe fits

Tiny or narrow feet might have been considered aristocratic at one point in time, but nowadays they're a royal pain when you try to find shoes to fit them. Conversely, if your feet are on the long or wide side, the problem can be just as great. That's why it would behoove you to know about Phillips Shoes, where they specialize in both narrow (AAAA) and wide (EEE), small (size 4) and large (size 12) ladies shoes in terrific, up-to-date styles. Among other things, you'll find espadrilles, wedges, polyunit bottoms and sandals with stacked heels, wedges or wood bottoms. Phillips Shoes: Twelve Oaks Mall, Novi, 349-8966 and Northland Center, Southfield, 569-2123.



Photos by
Dick Kelley

Fashion Calendar

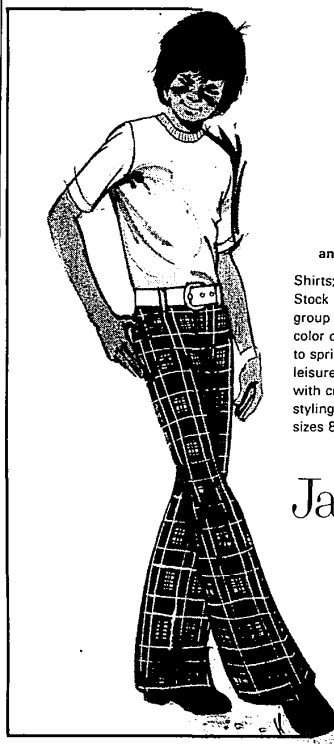
Wednesday, April 5

L'Auberge - Somerset Inn - Somerset Inn's L'Auberge dining room will present a fashion show with luncheon between 12:30 and 1:30 p.m. each Wednesday. The fashions will be presented by the Jaeger stores of Somerset Mall and will include clothing for both men and women.

Thursday, April 6

Thursdays - "Stepping Out and Up" is the title for the Detroit Regional Fashion Group, Inc. Career Day program. Program will take place at the Mercy College Conference Center, beginning with round table discussions at 9 a.m., followed by a second series of discussions at 11 a.m. Luncheon will be served at noon, for which there is a \$7 charge. For information contact Sharon Cowan, chairwoman, or call 522-7711 or 478-7789.

Georgian Bloomfield - Patients, families and friends will gather for luncheon and a fashion show presented by Chicks of Birmingham at Georgian Bloomfield, 2975 Adams Road, Bloomfield Hills. Members of the staff will join in the event, taking turns modeling the spring collection. Program gets under way at 12:30 p.m.



SALE

Boys' Knit Shirts
and Lightweight Pants

Shirts: \$4 - Pants: \$8
Stock up on a specially selected group of polyester/cotton solid color or patterned boyswear geared to spring school days and summer leisure. Short sleeve knit shirts with crewneck or collared placket styling. Shirts 8 to 20. Pants, sizes 8 to 16, regular or slim.

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