

Fun coats for women who love fur



Shoppers dash from rack to rack trying on coats in Roberts Fun Fair, Farmington Hills. Karen Pike models a raccoon section coat.

Story: RUSTLE SHAND
Photos: RANDY BORST

It was just before Christmas and each woman had stars in her eyes. One even confessed the ultimate self-bribe would be: "If I could have a fur coat, I would stop smoking."

The winter dream of any thin-blooded Michigan woman — a warm fur coat — was the object of all the fun. The place was Roberts Fun Fair, a new store in Hunter's Square, Farmington Hills.

All the barriers are down in this new shop. There is no concealed stock. Bargain price tags, ranging mostly from \$300 to \$850, dangle from coat sleeves. Fur content tags clearly name the fur, saying such things as "opossum paw" and raccoon or beaver sections.

The younger members of the fourth generation of the Roberts' fur clan hold court in the new shop, which is designed for young women who love the luxurious warmth of fur, but are not financially ready for investment furs.

Watching the shoppers dash from rack to rack, the brothers saw women pause to slip on a fur after fur. They laughed with customers who looked like teddy bears in lynx belly, or admired when others looked soft and supple in South American sheepskin. The younger Roberts brothers were obviously having just as much fun as their customers.

When the sleeves of one fur lined, poplin jacket were too long, Chad Roberts pinned them up. "Now," he said, stepping back to admire his handiwork, "go outside and walk around. See if it will keep you warm enough."

The niftiest safeguard against winter chill came in the form of a channel-quilted poplin full-length coat, fully lined and reversible to a soft fur side of New Zealand opossum paw.

For the pure fun of beating the North Wind at his own game, there are poplin jackets lined with shaggy, long-haired lamb or orthodox mixes of fur such as sheared beaver with curly lamb sleeves.

Nobody even suggested these furs will last a lifetime. "Probably," the furriers agreed, "not much more than five winters; but they'll be warm ones."



Opossum lines both of these coats. Karen Pike can choose between poplin and opossum paw when wearing this reversible coat. The fur lines Chad Roberts' poplin topcoat.

Jazzy waists give clothes super-charge

Story: RUSTLE SHAND
Photos: DICK KELLEY

Aerospace technology and old-world reptile skins have been combined in belts and jackets created by award-winning designer Alexis Kirk.

"Belts are the single most important accessory right now," said Kirk when he brought his spring collection to Claire Pearene's Somerset Mall shop recently.

"A great belt really makes an old outfit look new, it's true," said Kirk. "But more than looking simply new, an outfit can look great. It can look super. It all depends on the belt a woman adds."

In addition to his collection of Calcutta Karung snake belts, Kirk brought a new line of snakeskin jackets and leather skirts and pants.

Often compared to Fendi, who uses the same leathers, Kirk calls his designs "an American version of Fendi and Hermes."

"But, my things have a super-charge," he added. "They are a more forward version of the European classics."

Each of his items is entirely hand-made, he said. The belt buckles are gold or pewter plated by an aerospace specialist. "Many of the highly polished surfaces are ultrasonic polished," Kirk said. "We use the same people who plate the Cartier watch. Every piece has 10 microns of gold on it."

Born in California, Kirk's heritage is deeply root-

ed in the art of the old and new worlds. His love of old world crafts is inherited from his grandfather, who was master craftsman for the Lalique firm in Paris. He traces his eye for detail to his father, an artist for Walt Disney.

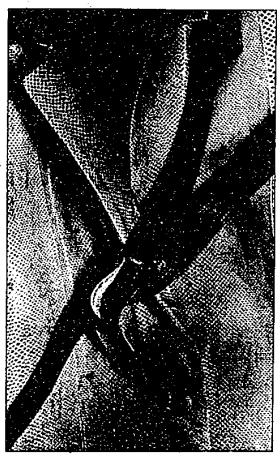
Kirk followed the family tradition by overpoling his unique approach to jewelry at the Rhode Island School of Design and Boston Museum School of Fine Arts. He completed his formal education at Harvard University under the world-famous architect Walter Gropius.

Kirk began his career with two years of teaching architecture and sculpture at the University of Tennessee. He then moved into textile research for the fabric division of Eastman.

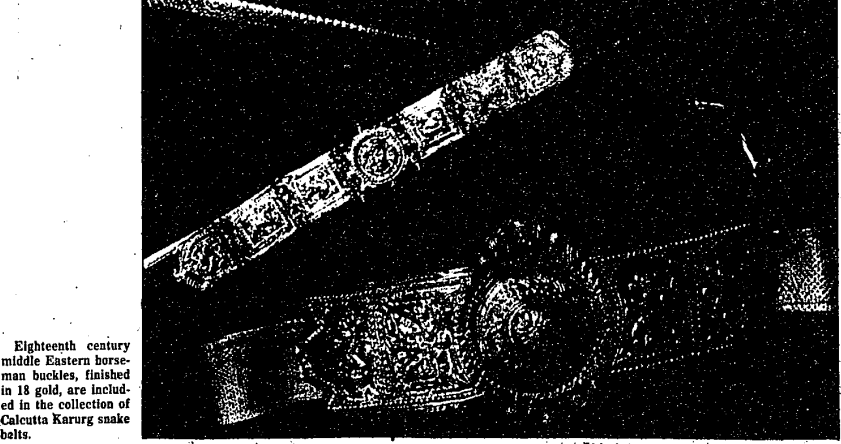
When he ventured into his own workshop and boutiques in Newport, R.I., he dressed such fashion leaders as Jackie Onassis and the late Duchess of Windsor.

After working as signature designer for Hattie Carnegie and El Greco Fashions, Kirk established his jewelry company in New York City. With his first collection, he earned the City Award. He also was named official U.S. bicentennial designer for his work in pewter.

Kirk has also been recognized with I. Magnin's "Great American Designer Award," the Freorick Atkins Award, French Couture Award and several gold medals from abroad.



Each item, like this pistol belt of French boot leather, is entirely handmade.



Eighteenth century middle Eastern horse-man buckles, finished in 18 gold, are included in the collection of Calcutta Karung snake belts.

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