

Raincoats look chic and keep out April showers



CARI WALDMAN

If you are under the notion that keeping dry and staying stylish at the same time is unattainable — just hold on. Here comes a stormy reality-check.

Micro-fiber coats with belts are amongst the key looks of the season. Once more, they'll keep you dry and looking chic.

Hey, it's not only you that's making a first impression, but also the coat. So even on the wettest days, why not make a sunny impression?

The season's choice raincoat comes in the form of the trench. But wait, I'm not referring to those demure, business types of trench coats or those overwhelming rain protectors inside which private eyes take refuge.

Those styles are no longer necessary thanks to the creativity and ingenuity of today's designers. They've combined high-tech fabrics and contemporary designs to create sexy, modern, knee-length, belted raincoats for today's woman. And, they do much more than just keep us prepared for sudden showers.

Raincoat quest
After rummaging through the racks of off-price stores, specialty shops and department stores to compare prices, take notes on color and the latest in waterproof fabrics, I discovered that raincoats all over town, including those with reasonable price points, have been made over for the season.

I also tried on different designs, including A-line cuts and single-breasted and double-breasted versions. I realized, if I wanted a vent in the back or a clean straight line, finding the right rain coat could be hard to do.

After all, a coat like this needs to serve many purposes: fit over our sleek work suits, be practical enough to survive dashing through puddles and getting in and out cars and work with our weekend routine.

(Some styles that dropped past the knee were stiff and unyielding. I suggest seeking out a nearby chair when trying them on.)

Overall, though, I'd have to say area department stores had the best selection. Saks Fifth Avenue, in particular, had an excellent assortment, including one of my favorites, a DKNY water-repellent, denim trench with self-tie. At \$275, it was both sophisticated and fun.

Also at Saks was a pale pink, single-breasted, three-quarter-length coat with belt by Drizile for \$260.

Portrai's black, high-shine, water-resistant coat, \$125 at Saks, was also cute and easy to throw on.

Classic goes chic
At the Somerset Collection's Burberry store, an image transformation seems to be taking place. And, bravo, it's classy, fun and chic all at the same time.

The new Burberry trench, dubbed "Lauren," is an A-line, single-breasted coat and comes in baby blue or white. Priced at \$495, you can choose to have the coat with or without a belt. In fact, the store's seamstress will sew on belt loops while you wait.

But wait, there's more. Even Burberry's signature plaid lining got a makeover. Now called the Nova plaid, the check has lighter colors to complement the company's new and youthful image.

More choices

Other noteworthy stores included J.Crew, Hudson's, Lord & Taylor and Lechmann's in West Bloomfield.

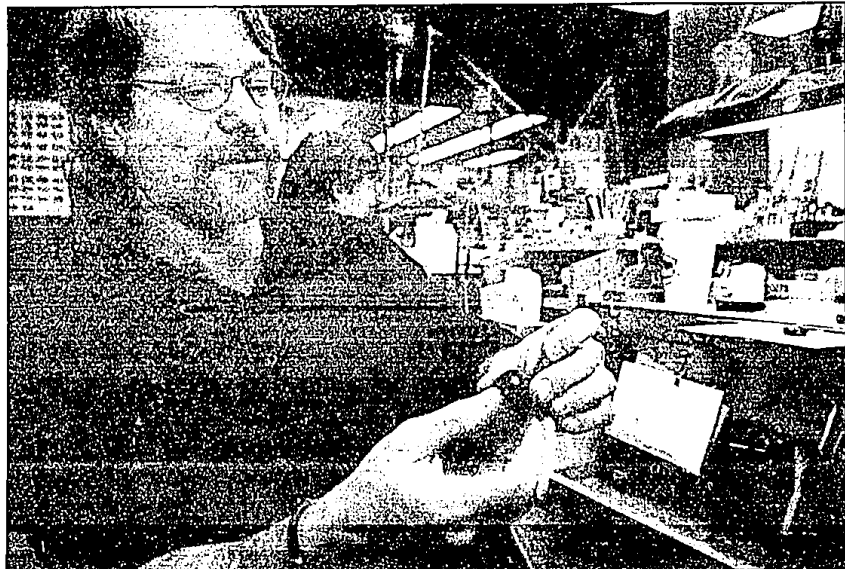
I think, for example, J.Crew's 100-percent, cotton, three-quarter-length coat in beige is perfect for casual gals. But don't take my word for it. Endeavor on your own quest for a raincoat that fits both your lifestyle and your personal sense of style.

Hey, you may be asking for a rainy day every now and then despite the damp dreariness. If nothing else, April showers will give you the opportunity to change your look, or at least your coat, for the day.

Cari Waldman is a free-lance writer and stylist who lives in West Bloomfield. Please send your style and shopping questions to Cari at OERealDeal@aol.com.

Material meanings

Award-winning jewelry designer seeks to touch people's lives



BY NICOLE STAFFORD
SPECIAL EDITOR

nstafford@ec.homedecor.com

A voluminous stack of orders and mighty collection of sculpting tools sit on Link Wachler's jeweler's bench in the back of Wachler & Sons Jewellers in downtown Birmingham.

But when Wachler creates jewelry — a process defined both by eureka moments and painstaking hours of molding, bending and excavating small bits of wax — he goes with the flow.

"You come up with the concept and then you do what works," says Wachler from his bench, holding a piece of red wax the size and shape of a ring — a mold that will be used to create a new setting for a customer's engagement diamond.

After the design is complete, the wax ring will create a plaster impression into which liquid gold will be poured.

Though Wachler has been creating fine, one-of-a-kind jewelry for his family's business for 35 years and received numerous awards, he struggles to define the craft in words. Most recently, he won the North American division of an international Tahitian pearl competition for an innovative Black pearl ring he created.

In a flash

"It's always different. One idea evolves from one idea to another," he says, speculating his latest award-winning design came to him "in one

instant."

The lustrous gray-colored pearl in Wachler's ring is encircled by platinum and diamonds but free to move within its setting, as if floating. It's also faceted, an innovation that adds to the piece's futuristic, almost other-worldly, appearance.

Wachler, who's currently sculpting a pendant based on the same concept, has been honored numerous times in both the Diamonds International Awards and International Pearl Design Contest.

Meaningful moments

But Wachler doesn't dwell on awards; he's as relaxed about competitions as he is about designing jewelry, joking that, while he's won many awards, "he lost a lot, too."

Perhaps that's because what Wachler most enjoys about his occupation is his relationship with clients and the satisfaction he gets from knowing his creativity becomes a meaningful part of other people's lives.

"The nicest thing is when you have that one-on-one relationship with someone and have been a part of something special — a wedding, an anniversary — it just makes me feel good," says Wachler.

In fact, most of the work done at Wachler & Sons Jewellers, a business owned and operated by Link, his brother Gary and cousin Buzz, is custom.

"That part is our niche," and it's based on reputation, personal ser-

vice and artistry in design.

"You can't get that kind of treatment from a computer," says Wachler. Once more, Wachler encourages his customers to collaborate with him and express their own creativity. "It's a way they can show they have creative tastes. ...And, I like it when people feel that way."

Eye of the beholder

Not to mention, jewelry's merit is literally reflected in the eye of the beholder, says Wachler.

"Jewelry doesn't have to be beautiful, he explains.

"It just has to pique somebody's interest." It can be simple or gaudy, traditional or modern, or something in between, as long as it suits the wearer and his or her lifestyle.

True, jewelry is a matter of aesthetics. But ultimately, it's about purpose and whether someone will wear and cherish it as a reflection of self, says Wachler.

Take, for instance, the jewelry that bedecked Hollywood's actresses last week at the Academy Awards. "It was pretty showy, but it wasn't anonymous showy than the clothing." In other words, all those flashy jewels suited both the occasion and the lifestyle of the wearers.

Wachler, of course, tries to be neutral about aesthetics. However, Wachler's own jewelry — a platinum and gold ring that pays homage to graffiti and bears his initials — might be a clue.

On the other hand, Wachler once created an exhibition piece called "Eye of the Beholder." It was a jeweled mirror trimmed in pearls and diamonds.

"In a way, it was almost a statement on jewelry itself. In that, it is in the eye of the beholder."



Futuristic: Wachler's faceted Tahitian Black pearl, platinum and diamond ring recently won the Tahitian Pearl Trophy award for North America.

Retail, style and special store events are listed in this calendar. Please send information to: Malls & Mainstreets, c/o Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 East Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009. Fax: (248) 644-1314. Information must be received by 5 p.m. Monday for publication the following Sunday.

TUESDAY, APRIL 4

AMOENA FIT EVENT

Jacobson's hosts a series of fittings with representatives from Amoenia, maker of prosthetic products for women who have undergone mastectomy surgery, through April 6, 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Dates and locations are as follows: April 4 at Birmingham store; April 5 at Rochester Hills store; April 6 at Livonia store, Laurel Park Place. Personal consultations and fittings are offered. To make an appointment, call (800) 837-5227 ext. 5273.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5

SPRING FASHION SHOW

Born To Shop women's clothing boutique showcases the latest spring looks at the store's annual fashion show at the Rochester Community House, 816 Ludlow, 6:30 p.m. Tickets, priced at \$9, include a light dinner and are available at Born To Shop, 527 Pine Street in downtown Rochester. For more information, call (248) 608-2920.

THURSDAY, APRIL 6

KAREN NEUBOURG VISITS

Popular sleep wear designer Karen Neubourg holds a pajama party complete with popcorn, trivia games and giveaways at Jacobson's in Rochester Hills. She'll also introduce her new collection of comfortable sleep wear, 11 a.m.-3 p.m., Intimate Apparel.

ADDED ATTRACTIONS

For more information, call (800) 837-5227.

INTIMATE APPAREL FITTING

Expert fitters from Wacoal visit Saks Fifth Avenue, the Somerset Collection in Troy, to assist customers select foundation garments, 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Intimate Apparel, third floor. For a personal appointment, call (248) 614-3328.

POKEMON EVENT

Livonia Mall, 7 Mile Road, hosts a Pokemon event featuring a tournament, game workshop and seminar for parents through April 9. For an event schedule, additional information or registration, call (248) 476-1160.

MEN'S FERRAGAMO SHOW

Vin Ferragamo's special order collection for men at Saks Fifth Avenue, the Somerset Collection in Troy, through April 10, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. on Thursday-Saturday and noon-6 p.m. on Monday, The Men's Store, first floor. For details, call (248) 614-3376.

SATURDAY, APRIL 8

APPRAISAL TV SHOW VISITS

Bring your treasures to Tel-Twelve Mall in Southfield where PAX-TV 31's antique and collectibles appraisal show is giving one free appraisal per person and taping for future broadcast, noon-3 p.m., Mall Center Court. For details, call (248) 353-4111.

TALANT & STYLE CONTEST

Nordstrom, the Somerset Collection in Troy, invites

customers, age 13-25, to showcase their personal style and talent as part of a national contest being promoted by "Teen People" magazine. Contestants model outfits or perform short artistic pieces in a two-minute video taped in Nordstrom's BE department, 2-5 p.m. For prize information and other details, contact Tracy LaCrosse at (630) 218-7914.

MACKENZIE-CHILDS VISITS

Nirvan Marcus, the Somerset Collection in Troy, hosts an appearance by housewares designer Victoria MacKenzie-Childs with signings of purchased items over \$400, noon-4 p.m., Gift Galleries, third floor. For information, call (248) 643-3300.

CARD CONTEST FOR KIDS

The Hallmark Gold Crown store at Oakland Mall in Troy hosts Creative Kids Day featuring art projects and a national, card design contest for children, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. For details, call (248) 865-9962.

SPORTS MEMORABILIA SHOW

Livonia Mall at 7 Mile Road hosts a sports card and memorabilia show featuring autograph sessions with Detroit Tigers. Show runs 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Autograph sessions run 1 p.m.-5:30 p.m. For information, call (248) 476-1160.

MEN'S TRUNK SHOW

The Claymore Shop, 908 S. Adams Road in Birmingham, hosts a trunk show of Alan Flusser's collection. For details, call (248) 642-7755.

BRIDAL FAIR

Jo Ann etc., 43570 West Oaks Drive in Novi, hosts a spring bridal fair featuring an elegant collection of bridal gowns from patterns, 1-3 p.m. For details, call (248) 449-8491.