

STREET SCENE

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SOUTHWEST AIRLINES SENIOR AGENT Roz Rosenstein has browsed at the Roz & Sherm clothing shop in West Bloomfield a few times. She recalls the store's atmosphere to be "glamorous and warm," but couldn't quite put her finger on the unique interior.

Rosenstein has heard the word "postmodern" floating around in conversations, but didn't recognize it while shopping. She was standing in the middle of it.

Just what does postmodern mean to those who use the word as well as to those who don't? Interestingly, there is a postmodern answer to that.

The term postmodern got its start in the 1950s among architects who were more interested in forms, historical or technical, rather than the disposition of space and mass.

Yet, the word today encompasses an age where new is nothing more than a renovation of the old.

And although applied to many art forms, it has been used to describe just about anything in present day western culture.

Rosenstein's mental definition was "after modern . . . the era coming back to antique." No truer stated. And Roz & Sherm couldn't be more exemplary.

Anne Frank, the store's buyer for the last 15 years, points out various aspects of its interior like the blackamoor statues, taken from the Metropolitan Opera Aida.

Chandeliers and other furnishings like dressing room mirrors, were originally in Saks Fifth Avenue on West Grand Boulevard in Detroit.

RICHARD KRAUSE, merchandise presentation manager, displays the men's ties on an old-fashioned, repainted ladder, producing an antique look. He has replaced many of the "T" stands that hold things like purses with garden statues, arms outstretched for hanging merchandise.

Fashion itself has revisited the '60s and '70s, according to Frank. She speaks of the Pucci prints (an abstract explosion of color done plurally and geometrically in the same design and usually including black), neon colors, wild lights and short skirts.

"Postmodern never came into fashion; it's just evolution," she said. "There's no way to make something completely new. It has to be taken from something old."

If Frank is correct, then what does the '90s have to offer the designers of the year 2000 and beyond?

"Bright colors put together in blocks," Krause said. "This is unique for the '90s. In the past, people used to dress in one color or in a tonality of one color."

"The '60s thing was a good way to get people to break their mold and think different," Frank added. "The fall is the return to the elegance of the past."

AT LA STANZA, a men's clothier in Birmingham, customer Charles Lewis, a manager at Volkswagen of America, relates to the term



At Roz & Sherm's in West Bloomfield, the leg of a display shelf unit (right) for the old Saks Fifth Avenue store in Detroit and a blackamoor statue from the Detroit Metropolitan Opera version of "Aida" turned plant stand are examples of post-modernism — where now is nothing more than a renovation of the old.



That postmodern look: Repackaging the past

postmodern only as an architectural style. He defines it as "an integration of geometric forms," but doesn't acknowledge it in relation to the suit he is trying on.

LaStanza co-owner Bob DeLaura says that in his business, postmodernism represents the "classic style" that is always around, just updated in design or fabrication. DeLaura prefers his client to be a man who knows "he bought something here that's timeless."

DeLaura doesn't wish to service the trendy and prefers not to classify his menswear as from a particular era.

"The designers, the trendsetters . . . you can't help follow what they're doing even if you may not like it," he said. "We control what we do and don't have to put up with what designers do."

DeLaura's accessories like the floral and jacquard print ties of the

'30s and '40s currently in fashion are the only samples of the past present in his store. They will, he said, be recycled again.

Postmodern started in architecture with the works of Michael Graves, Robert Stein and Philip Johnson and eventually lent itself to interior design. David Mark Weiss, owner of Interiorcorp Limited, a complete interior design service, said postmodern interiors "use the classic styles and shapes that have been created in the past."

ONE EXAMPLE he gives is the raised-paneled walls of the '20s, once seen so much in the palazzos of Italy and in homes in England.

"Today, they are treated a little differently, perhaps a coat of white paint over it instead of a natural wood or stain," he said, "where you have the beauty, detail and relief. They would take some of the concepts which have been used

throughout history in architecture . . . wonderful columns, barrel-vaulted archways and ceilings with a traditional keystone and quoins around it."

The interior designer added that color is interpreted differently in postmodern styles. Unlike in modern in which you have one color or texture, in postmodern, one sees many colors used together.

"Maybe you'll find a column painted an electric yellow with the capital painted a brilliant robin's egg blue," said the Oak Park businessman.

Locally, postmodern architecture can be seen in the Prudential Town Center's staggering structures and classic use of step. The traditional use of granite can be found in some of its lobbies.

"The nice thing about postmodernism is that it doesn't have to be loud or garrish," said Weiss who confesses that he doesn't have many "truly" postmodernists

for customers. But the ones he does have are described by Weiss as "progressive and wanting to be on the cutting edge of design."

"IT'D HARD to say how long it's going to last. I think it's reached its apex," he said of the era that began in the '60s.

Alan Oldham likes some of the postmodern music his radio station plays. The WDET disc jockey refers to postmodernism as "a redefinition of old icons of the past and their application today."

As an example, he points to college pop radio groups that use old '60s imagery like the psychedelia. They make music based on the hippie garret. Likewise with rappers who use black music. Their sampling are soul records produced by artists like James Brown.

"The lyrics are new, but the rhythm is old," he said.

The Wayne State University graduate who is embarking on a new, and additional gig at Net-WEIRK, a Mount Clemens dance music club, said postmodern music is taken from the whole past. It came into existence around 1979 when the punk (New Wave) movement was just hitting America.

THE NEW Wave sound was generated when British music groups came to the U.S., offering an alternative to the heavy metal and pop music that was so familiar to Americans at the time.

Oldham considers all rap music as postmodern because "they fuse in the relevance of our era with the musical structure of the old." He lists names like Toronto's Dream Warriors, whose recordings are based on past jazz records, and California's School of Fish, who use "all the old '60s stuff and repackaging it" while strutting in top hats and looking psychedelic, as postmodernists.

Those attracted to the postmodern sound "are creative, adventurous people who weren't satisfied with what radio feeds them everyday," Oldham said.

"We going to be seeing young guys playing old jazz like the Charlie Parker type jazz," he predicted.

While Oldham forges past jazz sounds returning to the music circle, art expert Vincent Carducci is more enthused about postmodern as an age when he hopes "artists stop being artists and start being involved in something significant."

"It is a crisis of legitimacy, a rift within western culture whereby 'otherness' emerges," said Carducci, who donates his designing talents to promote the Michigan Housing Trust Fund, an association working for affordable housing for low-income families. "Feminism, 'people of color,' multiculturalism are all postmodern social manifestations."

CARDUCCI, MICHIGAN editor of Art Examiner and contributing writer to Art Form, added that postmodern art which began in the mid-'70s is a "denial of originality." The artist expressing himself in a totally different way, he brings together existing elements to form some kind of communication.

Photographer Sherie Levine is an example. Levine takes pictures of people's photographs. Carducci also cited artist Mike Bidlo who repaints other artists' works.

Carducci's major concern with postmodern art is that it has lost faith in art's power to do anything socially. It's just another way to keep the game going, he said. And postmodern followers are "trendoids — people who just see it as the next trend."

"It's not over," said Carducci. "But the trendoids like to think it's over. I've got it. It's bad to be racist and women should be equal . . . so let's get back to the business of exploiting."

"Postmodern may be heralding some great cultural shift. It's a form of cultural relativism, recognizing that people are different."

Postmodern architecture can be seen in the Prudential Town Center's staggering structures and classic use of step. It contrasts with a glass leaf wall-mounted lighting fixture, originally used in Saks Fifth Avenue in Detroit, now at Roz & Sherm in West Bloomfield.



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