

Fluent in Flair

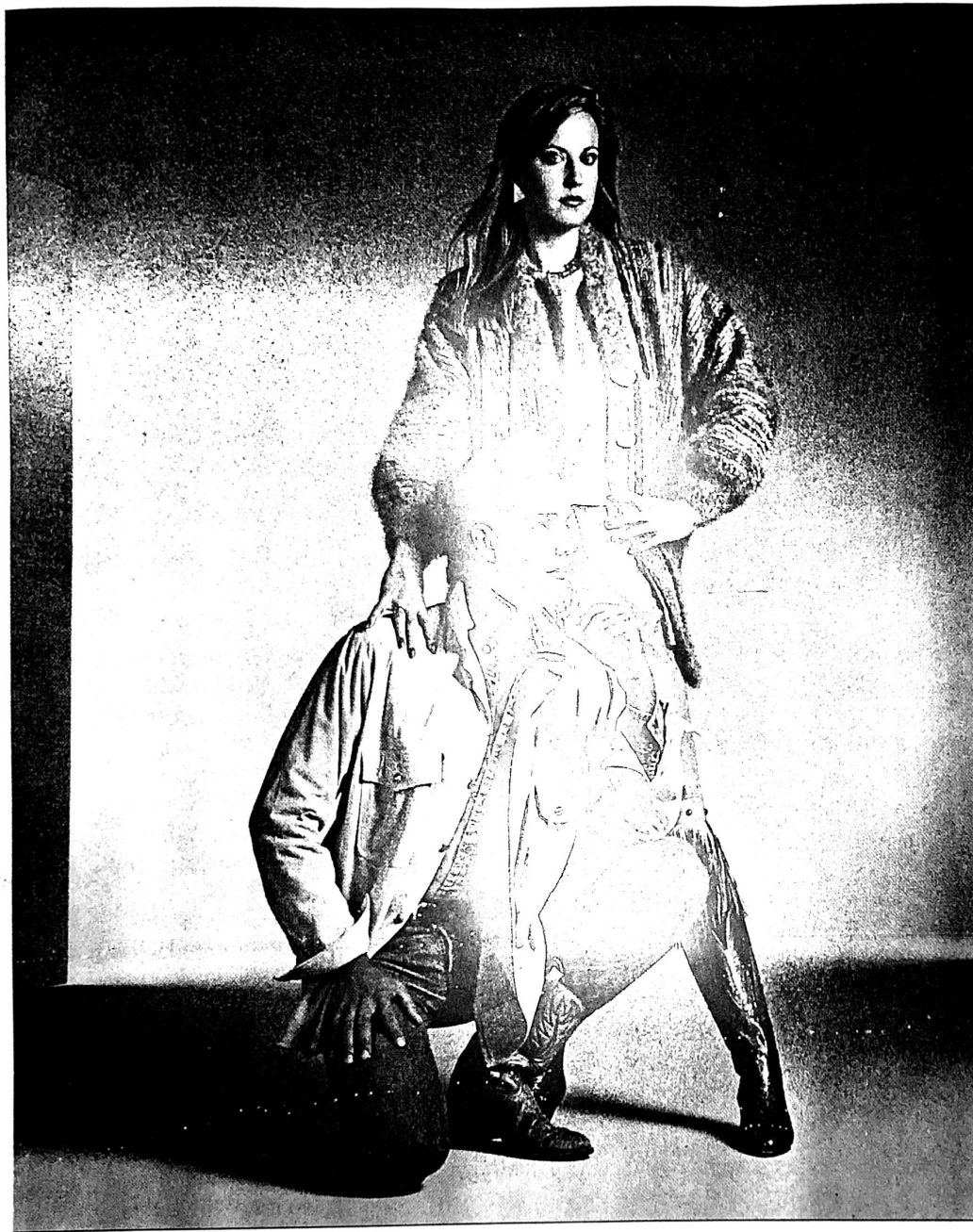
Sensuous and rugged. Urban, and of the land. Southwestern haute couture speaks to the world with a distinct accent BY HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA



Susan Summa's tunic "Mother Earth, Father Sky" (\$850), from Timbavati of Santa Fe, is accented by black calf riding boots (\$165), from Papagallo of Santa Fe, and by Timbavati's silver earrings (\$87). The mahogany leather belt with turquoise and silver ray buckle (\$325) is from James Reid Ltd., Santa Fe.

Southwest fashion used to mean blue jeans and cowboy boots. For a formal occasion, a woman might break out her squaw dress and her ropes of silver and turquoise jewelry. A man would wear clean jeans and polish those boots.

Those habits persist but Southwest fashion today dictates a sophistication that could have as much in common with Paris as Phoenix. Designers in New Mexico, Arizona and Texas are incorporating the craft traditions and materials of the Old West with couturier styling. No more the bohemian trend of a handmade and quite possibly homely poncho, or the embroidered muslin shirt.▷



The spell of the Southwest, with its wide open spaces and calming climate has drawn some of the country's finest designers, weavers, jewelers and leather workers. They are turning out costumes and accessories with an appeal that works whether you are knocking back tequila in the local saloon or sipping martinis at the Algonquin.

The influence of the Southwest has been seen for many years in the clothes of such mainstream designers as Ralph Lauren, George Marciano of Guess? and Calvin Klein. The mythology of the macho loner cowboy, the tough but sensitive pioneer woman, the stuff of John Ford westerns, it all has infinite appeal to those of us who are bound by urban, or suburban life. The Southwest's own designers are answering that need today with looks that combine sensual appeal with a rugged singular vision.

The clothes featured here may be created under a broad blue sky, in sight of some crimson and black mountain ranges, where cosmic mystery permeates

A silk blouse (\$410, with matching skirt and sash), a taupe leather skirt (\$450) and Place Vendome's boots (\$420) are pulled together by a Nancy Paap sweater made of chow chow hair and silk (\$950). The blouse, skirt and sweater are from Santa Fe Weaving Gallery of Santa Fe; the boots are from Origins of Santa Fe. The outfit is accented by Pamela Adger's necklace (\$105), from Timbavati. The necklace is made of 2,000-year-old beads from Mali. The cream chamois men's shirt (\$430) is from Char-Sher Designs.



Pamela Adger's necklace of black onyx, carnelian, ivory and silver (\$250), from Timbavati, adorns a ruby suede sheena dress (\$420), topped by a ruby suede opera coat with raspberry silk velvet and black fox (\$1,250). Both the dress and the coat are from the Milagro Collection of Char-Sher Designs of Santa Fe. Nelson Ewing's sterling silver and gold bola tie (\$2,000), from Artigianos of Scottsdale, rings a chamois electric blue Western shirt (\$420), from Char-Sher Designs. The black alligator belt (\$685) is from James Reid Ltd.

WHERE TO BUY — Pamela Adger's jewelry is available at Timbavati of Santa Fe. Nancy Bloch's shawls are available at Nancy Bloch Design of Santa Fe. Clothing from Char-Sher Designs and the Milagro Collection is available at Viva of Santa Fe (major outlet), Artigianos of Scottsdale and Saba's of Scottsdale. Nelson Ewing's bola ties and Ruby Firecat's handbags are available at Artigianos of Scottsdale. Estelle Gracer's sweaters are available at Estelle Gracer of Phoenix, Blanche of Beverly Hills, Nancy Bloch Design of Santa Fe, Jaks of Salt Lake City, Signatures of La Jolla, California, and Supris of Chicago. Clothing by Nancy Paap and Victoria Rabinowe is available at Santa Fe Weaving Gallery of Santa Fe. Belts by James Reid Ltd. of Santa Fe (catalog available). Susan Summa's clothing is available at Bazaar del Mundo in San Diego, Geraniums 'n Sunshine of Aspen, Mariposa of Albuquerque, Obsidian Gallery of Tucson and Timbavati of Santa Fe. Sandi Wright's silk dresses are available at Mariposa of Albuquerque and Timbavati of Santa Fe.

the atmosphere. But they are designed for an urban mentality, for après-ski rather than après rodeo. Most are one-of-a-kind, designer originals and priced accordingly. The Southwest, you see, produces artists, as well as artisans. For instance, a belt from James Reid in Santa Fe might set you back a few hundred but it will last a lifetime. Pick the one with a turquoise and silver ray buckle on a soft strip of black alligator and wear it on a black velvet skirt by night, and on faded Levis by day.

This is investment dressing Southwest style, retooling the basics with international panache. Santa Fe's Char B. de Vasquez, the designer of soft suede clothing for Char and Sher and Milagro melds the latest high fashion look with luxurious colored chamois, exotic furs like coyote and Tibetan lamb, and traditional Southwest motifs such as silver Zia buttons, snakeskin piping or patterns stenciled in the form of flowers or the geometrics of Indian pottery. The tonier men's



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shops in New York can't keep them in stock, but women like them too. This statement leaves the standard fringe jacket in the dust.

Santa Fe is well-known for artists who weave or knit high fashion designs. Nancy Bloch uses 30 hand-dyed yarns in her elegant shawls which may be worn over anything from leather jeans to an evening dress. Timbavati is a small boutique with an African, not Western, name and a first-rate selection of couturier knitwear for men and women by local designers. Sandi Wright weaves raw silk—hand-dyed in the unforgettable tawny peaches and misty blues of the Southwest—into dresses which she then paints with subtle, shadowy imagery. For a bolder statement, look to Susan Summa's machine-knit sweaters and tunics with graphic animal and geometric Indian patterning rendered bolder in primary colors offset with black. Timbavati also carries chunky primitive necklaces and earrings, the ideal accompaniment to the woven wares, by Texas designer Pamela Adger.

Nancy Paap, co-owner of the Santa Fe Weaving Center, knits sweaters that do more than keep you warm by the fire. Knitted of yarn that she spins from the hair of dogs—collies, chows, Samoyeds—they make good conversation pieces. Paap's partner, Victoria Rabinowe, makes ikat-dyed, hand-woven oversize shirts while her mother knits big, boxy sweaters for either gender in colors of the Southwest and graphic Indian patterns.

Estelle Gracer, in Phoenix, has taken the opposite tack, knitting sweaters from cotton chenille and other yarns that look bulky but are actually light to wear. Her stretchy blouson styles double as coats or jackets.

These pieces are so extraordinary of themselves, they don't need much dressing up. A couple accessories worth having, however, include Tucson designer Ruby Firecat's handbags. Some are composed in a simple feed bag shape but in what leathers! How about anaconda? The best of bags. And bolas are back in a big way—for both sexes. Look for them at Artigianos in Scottsdale. I especially like the hand-crafted silver bolas available there from Nelson Ewing of Tucson.

Now you can hit the trail in the American Southwest...or Paris.