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## Fashion trends reflect new life in DC

**By: Heidi Riviere/Contributing Writer**

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When Rosemary Reed Miller opened Toast and Strawberries clothing boutique in 1966, she awakened a refreshing taste for fashion in the District.

"D.C. was moving away from being a small southern town to a more urban environment in terms of its energy and this translated to fashion," Miller said.

Miller pioneered this movement, offering a showroom shop with trendy and different looks at Toast and Strawberries.

Miller, author of "The Threads of Time, The Fabric of History: Profiles of African-American Dressmakers and Designers, 1850 to the Present" remembers how uniform looks dominated the D.C. fashion scene back then. "People liked trendy clothes," Miller said. "But there was nothing around so they had no choice. The same mini dresses, baby doll dresses, heavy makeup, and solid colors were everywhere. "

But unlike the fashion trends of the 20's and 40's, Miller said that the designs of the 60's have withstood the test of time. Some styles are even making a comeback. "The baby doll dress is back but with an au pair v-neck [coupled] with a seam under the bust - an almost pregnant look," Miller said. "There are extremes of the mini that are shorter and longer. [And] Indian and ethnic prints are back."

A. Renee Cooper, president and creative director of the Josephine Dorsey, collection said that the trend in D.C. away from conservative fashion ensembles is not surprising.

"Ten or 20 years ago women worked at positions where they were told what to do," Cooper said. "Now more women are leaders in their industries. So now they have the ability to show more of their femininity."

Cooper noticed that young professionals in D.C. will wear pumps with beading or straps and higher heels with their suits. According to Cooper, today women purchase more signature accessory pieces than in the past, choosing unconventional locales like at home or in store jewelry parties over big retailers.

"These ornate necklace or earring purchases become a center piece for a dress," Cooper said.

Visitors to the historic U Street corridor are rewarded with a patchwork of offerings that cater to the

budget fashionistas. There is a popular weekend flea market, consignment stores, vintage shops, independent designers and jewelers.

Erin Monet Cooper, an employee at a local non-profit, said that the vendors at the flea market at 9th and U street NW are great at filling custom orders. "I personally know the vendors and if I am looking for a particular accessory or dress or special jewelry they get it for me," Cooper said.

According to Ms. Cooper, the vendors offer an assortment of vintage and second-hand clothing for way below market prices. She once bought a second-hand pair of Gucci pants for one-dollar.

New clothing boutiques are cropping up all over the city as many Washingtonians create signature looks and adopt a fashion-forward philosophy about their wardrobes.

Kareemah Woodard, an accountant and self-employed real estate agent, said you will always see her wearing A-line skirts, year-round wool blend pants, button-down shirts with cap sleeves, cargo pants and screen tees.

Similarly, Laura Oyini an employee at Microfinance, a local non-profit said that her fashion staples include jeans with flats or sandals and a nice top. As a relative newcomer to the District, Oyini said that she likes the new emphasis on all things fashion in the Washington Metro area.

"As someone who used to live in France, I would say fashion in D.C. has changed," Oyini said. "A few years ago I used to complain about the limited choice of clothing. But now it is much better, but sometimes too expensive." She said that "Shake Your Booty" in Adams Morgan was one of her favorite stores.

T-shirts are always en vogue. Jaja Nwokeabia, a 20-something designer for Ugo Seven, said that "T-shirts will always be in. "They are just cool. They are versatile and as timeless as jeans. You can never have enough," she said.

Nisey's Boutique in Mt. Rainier is definitely known for one of a kind t-shirts at under \$26. What does the future hold for the budding D.C. fashion industry?

Ms. Cooper optimistically notes that a good sign for fashion in D.C. is that national and international well-known designers such as Jimmy Choo and Barney's Co. for example are willing to spend their money here and open local stores. This shows that D.C. residents are willing to spend money on fashion, Cooper said.

Lara Akinsanya, designer and owner of L Shandi Designs, explained that in order to keep talented designers from moving out of D.C., we have to provide opportunities and the environment that spotlights their talent.

Akinsanya said that new groups like D.C. Fashionistas organize events that shine a spotlight on everyone in the fashion industry from makeup artists to designers.

"Ladies Who Lunch" hosts trunk shows and a speaker series on fashion. Akinsanya added that the District needs to develop talent by continuing to support events like Runaway to Africa and D.C. Fashion Week so we don't lose designers to New York.

Heidi Riviere is a local style consultant and owner of Diva Bugs.

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