

Bon chic, bon genre: Fashion fads for winter

Corey E. Devine

I can't think of one good thing about winter. It's terribly cold. It rains. The sky is always gray. Oh, wait. Cashmere is good. In fact, wool is good too. Maybe there is something good about winter — the clothes. The thought of putting together a winter wardrobe may be painful to some members of the Rice community, so the Lifestyles section has put together a handy guide to this year's winter garb. It's sure to win you kudos from everyone — even the Old Navy lady.

I sometimes wonder if designers revisit previous fashion eras simply because they are out of ideas. I've never come to a conclusive answer, but enlightened or not, big names have returned to the '70s. Tom Ford, head designer for Gucci, has created some wonderfully retro silk shirts (think Studio 54 style), and every Versace model is sporting huge bleached hair (think Tammy Faye Baker) and wide butterfly collars. Even the famously futuristic Prada line includes huge '70s-inspired sunglasses (think Erik Estrada in "Chips"). The whole fad has trickled down to everyday brands. The Gap is pushing dark, unwashed jeans. Their daughter store, Old Navy, wants everyone in denim jackets. Collegiate wardrobe mainstay J. Crew has a full selection of boot-cut jeans along with small-wale corduroy that would feel right at home in a scene from "Charlie's Angels." I personally think the whole thing is silly. The '70s were a horrific time for fashion (except for the cool aviator sunglasses).

It seems that brown and black are always fighting in the realm of fashion. Designers invariably choose one or the other as the basis for their fall wardrobe. Even urban fashion mainstay Banana Republic has added "coffee bean" to its winter line up. Historically, brown hasn't been considered a very formal color. Brown wasn't appropriate for job interviews or other important events, but that's all over now. Men and women should think

seriously about investing in some nice brown garb for winter. Even if we can't all take weekends in the British countryside, we should at least look like we do.

luxe in
leather

pants are hot this year — literally and otherwise. Low-range stores like Old Navy advertise what they (charmingly enough) refer to as "pleather," while big names like Donna Karan and Kenneth Cole are offering the real thing. At first it was just in black. Then came the other colors. Prada's red leather pants for men and women have been selling well. The Gap offers women's leather skirts in green and maroon. It's also selling men's leather pants in brown and black. Donna Karan's more affordable line, DKNY, and Kenneth Cole have included leather shirts in their lines. Even bastion of conservative style Ralph Lauren has a suede shirt hanging on his racks. If all this seems too cutting-edge for you, get a leather coat. Not a bomber or something equally bulky — leather coats this year are all about minimalist, sleek styling.

The shoe to have this winter is the boot. What kind of boot, you ask? Frankly, it doesn't matter. For men, most designers are suggesting ankle boots, but Kenneth Cole has updated the classic cowboy boot into something even a city slicker can enjoy (blame Madonna's cowboy persona for this). For women, tall "go-go" boots seem to be the thing. Armani has a few boots in his collection and shoe virtuoso Salvatore Ferragamo has an ample selection of boots in stores. If you're not looking to plop down half a grand for a pair, try J. Crew, Banana Republic or Kenneth Cole.

All three offer cheap but acceptable alternatives. Oh, the other cool thing about boots is that they aren't just in boring leather this year. Imitation exotic prints abound this season. Usually, these have been reserved for women, but men's boots are offered in all sorts of leathers. Python-stamped leather is big for both men and women. Pony hair, though not as popular for men, is being offered for both genders as well. Croc-embossed leather isn't big this year, but it seems ostrich-stamped leathers have stolen their place in the sun.

Everyone has picked up leather this year. Yes, everyone. My advice? Go get some. Leather

Basically, it's the usual suspects for fabrics this winter. At this time last year, Banana Republic was trying to sell us anything they could, as long as it was made from cashmere. For some reason, they've avoided it this year. Bigger designers like

fashion
fabrics

Donna Karan are still turning out inventive styles with higher-end fabric.

Hugo Boss uses it too, but he's discovered something he thinks is much better: high-tech fabrics. They're just as big for winter as they were for summer. Synthetic, nylon-like fabrics are big. I tend to shy away from this stuff because I've always thought that fabric made from non-naturally occurring materials is just wrong (think polyester), but I guess it does something for some people. Prada designers love the stuff. Stretch is still being used in everything from shirts and pants to underwear. A touch of stretch does add certain resilience to garments, but you don't need Lycra in everything you own.

For women, tweeds are in. In fact, any big heavy pattern is seemingly OK for winter. For the younger crowd (a.k.a., us), the "school girl" look is in again. BCBG has pleated skirts, and you can find those knee-length plaid skirts almost anywhere. Ralph Lauren (who else?) has his own interpretation. Big, bold plaids reds and greens are in this year. You'll also find some of this season's omnipresent brown and, of course, white. Guys get the analogous "school-boy" treatment with plaids and argyles. You'll look cool in your Abercrombie and Fitch plaids with a light wool sweater on top. Also, don't be afraid of plaid pants. They're everywhere this season. Men and women should go for big vertical striped sweaters in browns, dark greens and reds. You can pick one up at Old Navy or, if you have the cash, at Neiman Marcus.

For college students, fall fashion is all about looking like a college student. I don't mean an urban, modern college student either. We're talking New England, Ivy League college student. Stick to brands like Abercrombie and Fitch, J. Crew, Tommy Hilfiger and Ralph Lauren for the looks you crave. T-shirts layered with sweaters and heavy coats will keep you warm while looking cool. Keep it simple, and you'll look great in any weather.

perfect
patterns

brassy
boots

basic
brown

food on foot

corey e. devine



DANIEL KOCEVSKI/THRESHER

MI LUNA TAPAS RESTAURANT & BAR
2441 University Blvd.
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*Jeans acceptable.
Veggie friendly.
Alcohol: full bar.*

Mi Luna is a tapas restaurant. For those of you who haven't consulted your Dictionary of Hipness lately (or ever, for some Rice students), tapas is a way of eating that originated in Spain — drinks were traditionally served with a plate on the top to keep the flies out.

Restaurants began to put a small appetizer on the top of the plate as a bonus for buying a drink, I guess. Well, that's the story.

Now, going out for tapas and sangria seems to be all the rage. And Mi Luna is the only place to do it in the immediate vicinity of Rice.

The first thing that will strike you about Mi Luna is the noise. It's a very loud restaurant. Then, when you find your way over to the host, they'll tell you there's an hour wait. But wait, you think, it's a Wednesday. I know that. There's a two hour wait on the weekend. I won't even mention parking problems — they piss me off too much.

Stick around, though, and you'll be happy you waited. The food is wonderful.

My advice on ordering: Try things that seem a bit strange. Mi Luna does a good job with inventive dishes like grilled vegetable and goat cheese pizza (\$4.95). I've never been disappointed. Also, everyone at the table should order a few tapas. You're all going to share, but one appetizer-sized portion per person won't be enough to pass around. I usually allow three dishes per person.

Standout menu items include the queso de cabra montanes (baked goat cheese in a tomato basil sauce \$5.95). It's served with toast squares but works equally well on the complimentary bread.

I'm also a big fan of the salmon a noso estilo (\$8.95). It's a marinated salmon filet wrapped in flavorful serrano ham, then baked pizza-style in a wood-burning oven. Mi Luna serves it up on a bed of sautéed wild mushrooms.

The drinks are also quite good. It's most evident by the pack of care-free yuppies crowded around the bar every night of the week. Try the sangria swirl margarita. It combines the sweetness of sangria with tart margarita flavor for an end product that's truly heavenly.

The atmosphere is OK. As I said before, I find it a bit cramped, but the decorating is well done — lots of wrought iron and pictures of bull fighters. I'm a bit intrigued by the huge mural of a Selena-looking woman on one of the wall. It's a bit scary.

This isn't a cheap dinner experience. At \$6 apiece, enough tapas to serve three will run you close to \$20. Remember, that's before drinks.

I suggest trying tapas on Tuesday. Ask for the special \$2 menu. It's a much less extensive version of the regular menu, but everything on it is only \$2 — a deal you shouldn't pass up.