

blinded by science

Farewell to all that chiffon and cashmere. This spring, designers have taken fashion to the laboratory—and the results are literally dazzling. Plum Sykes meets the new generation of technostyle stars.

GLOW BABY:
JUNYA WATANABE
COMME DES
GARÇONS SHORTS
SUIT, LEFT.
ALEXANDRE
HERCHOVITCH
SEQUINS, RIGHT.

anke Loh is a serious-minded 28-year-old Belgian designer. She wears a lot of black, and she doesn't wear makeup. She is always thinking. Her last year was spent thinking very, very hard about how to make clothes that react to their environment. Meanwhile, a continent or two away, in São Paulo, 29-year-old Brazilian designer Alexandre Herchovitch was debating the same question. And in Tokyo, Junya Watanabe was asking textile experts whether he could express in fabric the light and texture of everyday technology.

These designers are all developing high-tech fabrics to help them create fashion that feels genuinely new. Experimenting in stretch, Lycra, and rubber was an eighties phenomenon, and the early-nineties designers attempted to appropriate the kinds of fabric technologies that companies like Nike were using for their sports products. But as the nineties progressed, innovators such as Helmut Lang moved away from the avant-garde and into the grown-up world of cashmeres, silks, and chiffons—leaving a void that is *view* ▶ 178

VOGUEVIEW

NIFTY HANDWORK:
ANKE LOH'S HEAT-
SENSITIVE SHEATHS
ARE SPRING'S
CHICEST SPIN ON
THE MOOD RING.



also changes the surface of the fabric—a reaction as sexy as it is

avant-garde. In daylight, the layered dresses change from a washed-out green to a softly glowing blue, violet, or yellow.

In Junya Watanabe's show, the effect of light on the clothes was extraordinary. Simple, sporty pieces like beach shorts, pantsuits, or white shirts took on an almost ghostly presence in the dark. The models became invisible, and the audience was mesmerized by an electric-yellow suit, fluorescent-green shorts, and a glowing white shirt that made their way, floating, along the catwalk, as if by magic.

Although Watanabe says that key inspirations for this collection were light, digital imagery, and the technology of

daily life, in the end technology could not offer a way to create the futuristic look he wanted. Ironically he found the elements he needed to create the fabrics in nature—just as people have done for centuries. It was the ground on which he stood that held the key: “I needed a luminescent ingredient,” explains Watanabe. “The essence of the glow-in-the-dark fabric is a blend of raw materials found in natural stone, crushed and formulated into a paste and printed on the fabric.” The future of fashion, it seems, is still found in the past. □

view ▶ 180

rapidly being filled by the Lohs, Herchcovitchs, and Watanabes of the world.

In daylight, Alexandre Herchcovitch's jackets look like the kind of trendy sequined numbers a girl might wear downtown at night with jeans. In the dark, they glow because natural and artificial rays bounce off the finish. Despite the futuristic look, the clothes don't feel hard or strange. The plastic reflective sequins that Herchcovitch specially developed are soft and malleable. His shift covered in silk-georgette flowers is as fluid as any of John Galliano's lightest evening gowns, but in the dark the whole ensemble shines like a night-light. Herchcovitch is a *Star Trek* fan. He is inspired by “those sci-fi movies where people would be able to travel instantaneously through a light beam.”

While Herchcovitch was brushing up on *Star Trek*, Loh was studying the flesh. “I think the future is clothes that change or have a life,” she says, as serious as ever. “Fashion is connected with the body. I think our own connection to our bodies has changed because so many things are now possible in medicine.”

Loh's graphic, simple tops and more complicated layered dresses, all of which have an incredibly modern and minimal feel, are either light- or heat-sensitive. Placing a hand on her gray tube dress leaves a blurry handprint in the exact spot. The heat of movement