



# THE SUNDAY TIMES

# STYLE

*Nostalgia was the name of the game in New York, where the catwalks were crammed with rock chicks and disco queens.*

*JEREMY LANGMEAD reports*

**S**hopping this autumn should be easy: just wear the decade you enjoyed the most. At the New York shows the American designers served up a concoction of ideas rehashed from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The 1990s barely got a look-in.

It wasn't just the outfits that were dripping with nostalgia; the whole city was. New York is in the grip of Studio 54 fever. The hedonistic nightclub that lasted three short but celebrated years is, 20 years later, still very much in the present. The writer Anthony Haden-Guest has just published *The Last Party: Studio 54, Disco and the Culture of the Night*, a book that centres on the nightclub and its antiheroes, Steve Rubell and Ian Schrager. Its shiny, silver cover was almost as necessary an accessory last week as Gucci's bamboo-handled handbags. There's also a weekly tribute night at the downtown Z Bar called Studio Filthy Whore, and Whit Stillman, director of the films *Metropolitan* and *Barcelona*, has just finished the first draft of a screenplay — *The Last Days of Disco*. Guess what it's about.

The Studio is also the subject of an exhibition at the chic Serge Sorokko Gallery. Three hundred photographs and video footage of the characters within — and the crowds outside — the club are all featured. There are shots of Andy Warhol, Halston, Liza Minnelli and Bianca Jagger reclining on sofas surveying a dancefloor heaving with a peculiar mix of naked men, topless women and septuagenarian regulars such as Disco Sally, the dancing granny. And there are plenty of pictures of co-owner Rubell monitoring the door as hundreds of revellers try to catch his eye and get past the bouncers.

This was, of course, no easy feat: Rubell's door policy was unpredictable. Two young women featured in Haden-Guest's book decided on a look that they were certain would ensure their admission to a Halloween party. They borrowed \$500, rented a horse, shed their clothes and trotted up to the velvet rope as twin Lady Godivas. Rubell looked them up and down and pronounced: "Okay. The horse can come in. But you girls have to stay outside." According to Baird Jones, the New York gossip columnist and a Studio regular, someone even died trying to gain entry. "This guy got stuck in a vent trying to get in," he claims. "It smelt like a cat had died. He was in black tie."

The club's eclectic mix was something Rubell strongly believed in. If he liked the way they looked, he would let in not only the rich and famous but their limo drivers, too. Rubell, who died in 1989, said that "the perfect party was like a tossed salad". You needed a good mix.

And it's this advice that the American designers should have heeded before showing their collections. With a few exceptions, the same ideas were served up again and again, with rocker chic being the most popular. Black leather jackets, matching short skirts and minidresses popped up everywhere. If you're not into black leather, don't worry, there was also gold, silver, chestnut and even white to choose from. Lurex and spangles were also all over the place, as were crochet, fur trimmings, patchwork, sequins and fishnet. It was all very frock'n'roll. And this was part of the problem. Although the pop stars most frequently spotted sitting in the front rows were quite trendy — Maxwell and James Iha of the Smashing Pumpkins — those that were cited as influences by the designers were all old hat: Mick Jagger, David Bowie, Pat Benatar and Patti Smith. Most worryingly, although she didn't get a mention, it was Stevie Nicks's wardrobe that appeared to have been raided the most.

Not everyone hit a dud note. Michael Kors managed to update the rocker chic look into a sexy collection that, despite being labelled by himself as "trashy elegance", was anything but. Ralph Lauren showed a solid if uninspired collection that combined power-dressing pinstriped suits with silver sequined tops, and Donna Karan, nipple-revealing eveningwear aside, produced covetable tailored jackets and trousers in luxurious double-faced knits and rich cashmeres.

Her cheaper DKNY collection, however, was received less enthusiastically. Suzy Menkes of the Herald Tribune claimed it was derivative of earlier collections by the European designers ➤➤➤