

1. Here's the scoop: **Richard Chai** applies square crystal "gems" to a mix of artfully pieced together off-white fabrics in an accessible A-line shape.

2. A collar fit for an African queen from **Fusun Designs**: Chains tipped with turquoise fall regally from a handstitched circle.

3. **Tory Burch's** summer-weight vest (\$265) gleams with a topstitched yoke of pearlized material and a flower-shaped metal closing.

4. Appliquéd ribbons on **Proenza Schouler's** signature bustier create a shapely trompe l'oeil corset-and-bra effect; the pencil skirt is extravagantly embroidered.

5. Catch of the day: A knotted leather "fishnet" strung with big, vivid beads crisscrosses a linen bag from **G Series by Cole Haan** (\$345). ▶



Handcrafted Chic

Dressing like an individual just got easier: You can now get a one-of-a-kind feel with clothes that combine age-old techniques and materials—from exquisite needlework to exotic beads—with modern design. **KATHERINE B. WEISSMAN** reports.



CONSUELO CASTIGLIONI

Marni

Playing with Shapes

Gorgeous form and quirky content—with materials ranging from resin to patent leather, satin to feather-printed cotton—are what Consuelo Castiglioni lives for. The distinctive handmade look pioneered by the 51-year-old designer of the Milan-based Marni label combines elements from modern art, hobby-shop kits, and indigenous cultures—a process, as she once described it, of “bringing together different times, places, and attitudes, creating a mosaic that allows intriguing transformations.” Since 1994 Marni’s big, geometric color blocks, slouchy fit, and layers of texture have helped

Cotton that glitters? A simple apronlike shape sets off the fusion of ornaments on this Marni dress.

drive fashion’s evolution from bohemian to embellished to artsy-craftsy. The clothes encourage us to throw off grown-up uniforms and return to a mischievous, childlike pleasure in self-adornment. They’re reminiscent of brilliant thrift-store buys—the kind you bring home shouting, “Look what I found!”—but so adroitly tailored that they never look costumey or affected. *CONTINUED ON PAGE 98*

▼ A necklace of stuffed, stitched, and dyed cotton rectangles from Marni (\$357) suggests a once-elegant, much-hugged rag doll.



◀ Handwoven leather slides by Robert Zur (\$170) have a Moroccan flavor: perfect with summer’s gauchos or skinny pants.

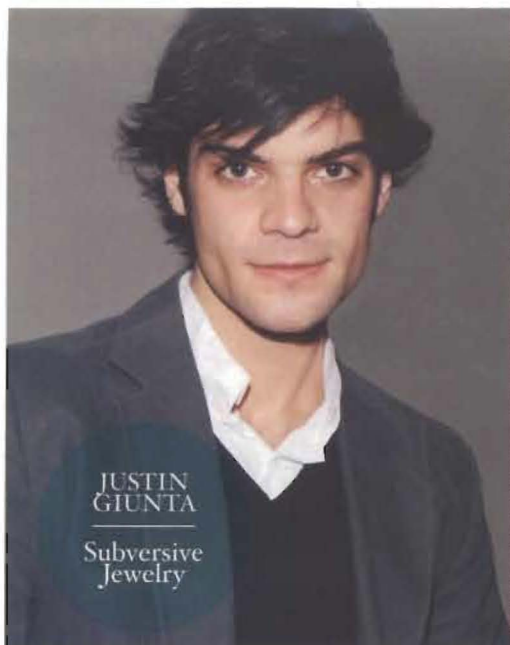


◀ At Marni clusters of appliquéd rounds appear and reappear on dresses, bags, shoes, and belts.

▲ A floral embroidered border with pearly insets—very *Passage to India*—gives Reiss’s swingy skirt (\$190) the right degree of dressiness.

◀ Coconut-disk handle, raffia-backed shell flowers—with its beachcomber elements, this Tocca bag (\$262) looks as if it came of age in Samoa.





JUSTIN GIUNTA
Subversive Jewelry

Transforming Junk into Gems

Justin Giunta is an alchemist: His two-year-old company, Subversive Jewelry, challenges the idea that costly metals and stones are essential; what makes his baubles precious is how inventively the everyday materials are assembled. His studio is awash in color-coded drawers of beads, seeds, shells, crystals, feathers, coral, glass pearls—which Giunta, also a painter, refers to as his palette. Chains, chains, chains are the common denominator that

gives his work a bit of toughness and weight ("The way my necklaces sit on the chest makes people feel confident"), and his aesthetic references range from ancient Rome to modern Brazil: "I mix continents and historical periods, Baroque with industrial, pearls with bottle caps." Although the 26-year-old designer's wares are as hip as you can get, there is something authentic and fad-resistant about them. "Labor gets lost in our machine culture," he says. "My jewelry goes back to an earlier value structure where crafts dominated. I'm making a living with things I make with my hands."

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Naming each piece underlines its uniqueness: Here is Giunta's cryptically titled Wood Pollen Necklace with Ribbon (\$460).



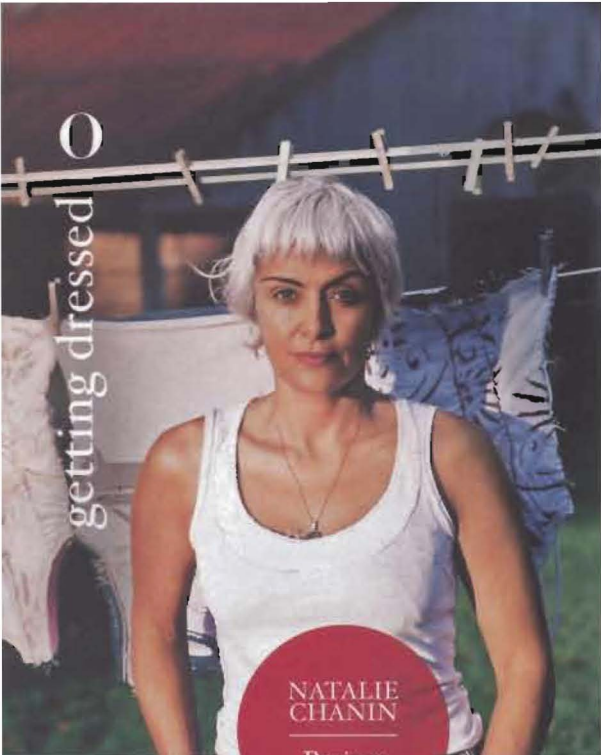
▲ Curvy vertical panels of dense embroidery add shape to an Elie Tahari silk jacket (\$698)—and to the body of whoever's wearing it.

► Bottega Veneta's craft consciousness goes for Baroque with handpainted stripes, an ornately embroidered bag and belt.

▼ Everyone loves lacy right now. This wedding cake of a Chloe shirt is bursting with crisp, dolly-like medallions.



◀ The low heel of this woven Georgina Goodman sandal (\$390) stacks up with different shades of wood—very organic.



NATALIE CHANIN

Project Alabama

It's Stitch Craft

"My mother's and grandmother's hands were always doing something—quilting, sewing, tating," Natalie Chanin remembers. These domestic arts became the basis of Project Alabama, founded with business partner

Enrico Marone-Cinzano in 2000.

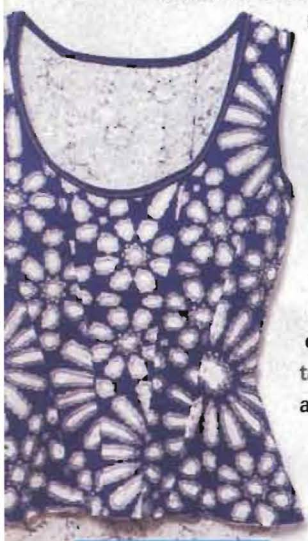
The company's rootedness in the Southern community where Chanin grew up is part of its integrity and charm:

Local women make the clothes, converting sweet-old-lady needlework into sexy, sought-after fashion—like quilted and embroidered cotton jersey corsets and tanks. (Because the pieces are labor intensive, and thus expensive, a book for do-it-yourselfers is in the works.) Project Alabama's designs are built to last:

While Chanin, 44, isn't a purist about disposables ("I think the paper towel is a great invention!"), she'd "rather have a dress my daughter could inherit than

something I'd throw in the garbage after one season." And she is literally a hands-on entrepreneur. "I love stitching," she says. "I find it meditative." ●

Future heirloom: Floral quilting renders this shapely Project Alabama shell a little bit country.



► Give this White House Black Market skirt (\$118) a whirl—the bold sculptural appliqué goes with any solid color.



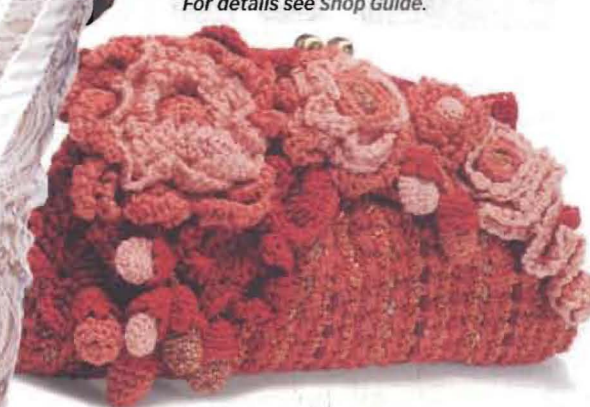
▼ Country meets city when rustic denim and plaid linen patchwork are sleeked into a Ralph Lauren Collection suit.



▼ A cha-cha-friendly platform from Sam Edelman (\$125) is garnished with flowers of batik fabric and lots of natural fiber.



▼ Garlands, darling? This plump Isabella Fiore clutch (\$325) is spilling over with whimsical crocheted blooms. For details see Shop Guide.



► Lace is more: Balenciaga pants have sexy inserts, and the jacket positively drips with the stuff.

