

## A sigh of relief, a round of applause for graduating fashion designers

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The non-jaded fashion show crowd showed up recently for two big sartorial events when graduating seniors from the California College of the Arts and the Academy of Art University put on their big annual spring runway shows.

We're not kidding about the size. The AAU show was held under an enormous white tent on Brannan Street that sat 1,500, while more than a thousand guests took in the CCA show at Fort Mason.

On the AAU runway, the fashion students sent out polished, mature work that impressed New York designer Zac Posen, who attended the show and selected senior Jenny Schweitzberger as his intern. Her collection of earth-tone, Western-inspired fitted wool coats and jackets with slim pants, as well as a silky pale blue scoop-neck cocktail dress, showed a high level of sophistication. (Another student's collection of whimsical, cartoonish knitwear that covered the models from head to toe was wacky, but so well made that it worked.) Also unusual and very pretty were a series of evening "gowns" made from the environmentally conscious packaging used by French Rabbit wines, an eco-friendly wine producer in France.

Posen, along with Pulitzer Prize-winning Washington Post fashion journalist Robin Givhan and Parisian Loulou de la Falaise, the longtime muse to Yves Saint Laurent, were awarded honorary doctorates from the academy, whose fashion department is headed by Gladys Perint Palmer; Simon Ungless, the academy's director of graduate fashion, produced the show.

At CCA, the mood was more festive than usual to mark the school's centennial year. Retailer Wilkes Bashford was honored. On the runway, the CCA students, under the direction of fashion department co-chairs Amy Williams and Neysa Young (who produced the show), were a bit more free-form than at AAU, and showed collections ranging from a series of architecturally curvy gray-and-black separates inspired by visionary architect Frank Gehry, to deconstructed shirts and pleated shorts worn with black face veils, to an adorable children's collection of colorful, layered knits over cargo pants and jeans. Student Christopher Weiss (of the face veils) was selected by the editors of Surface magazine to go back East to collaborate on a project under the aegis of the bicoastal fashion, lifestyle and arts publication.



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**A sparkly dress made from ecological wine packaging. Photo by John Lee, special to the Chronicle**