

Anti-fur forces still a minority, but fight goes on

By MARY MARTIN
NIEPOLD

NEW YORK — My son is a member of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. My daughter is active in Amnesty International. After one season of wearing it, I sent my mink stole to my mother last winter. And she couldn't be happier.

Somewhere in that is a three-pointed view of fur and what it means if you're the one wearing it.

And in this, the season of fur purchasing, the debate rages.

"I just think it's appalling," says designer Todd Oldham, 29, contributor to PETA and one of the hottest of the new fashion talents. "People involve themselves in murder for cosmetic reasons, and I find that so peculiar."

For his part, his firm also uses only merino wool, which he says generally is from sheep that are sheared, not brutalized. Last season, he manufactured blazers from processed cork instead of leather, and a percentage of the sales from three of his shirts, every season, go to some charity. He does wear leather shoes, he says, because he can't find a durable alternative for life in the city.

I, for one, simply can't put the pelt of an animal around my own body anymore. Industry experts have said, yeah, but you don't know whether that chicken you buy in the grocery store was raised and killed humanely either. Yeah, I say back, but I don't wear a chicken around my neck.

For me, some level of hypocrisy is unavoidable. I will wear leather because I, along with designers like Robert Comstock, view this as a by-product from animals in the food chain. Nor do I ask how the sheep were sheared, the ways the trees were cut or how the silkworms were gathered. As yet, I cannot find ways to save all living things.

But with fur, perhaps I can make a difference if I refuse to wear animal skins for my own pleasure. The doom and the glory of fur is that it is so visible.

"I just don't think wearing a fur is necessary," explains my 27-year-old daughter. "There are so many elegant alternatives."

But the right-to-wear side



RUFFLED SHAWL of sheared SAGA white mink is dyed red, left; sheared SAGA mink swing coat is by Claude Montana, right.



has strong numbers. Sandy Blye, executive vice president of the American Fur Industry, says fur sales in 1989 were "a record high," up from \$1.8 billion in 1988 to \$1.9 billion. Blye says that right now, "The demand for fur is very strong."

USA Today reported that in a recent Gallup Poll 89 percent of respondents "disagreed with positions and activities of animal rights groups." According to Blye, "The animal rights movement has not affected our business whatsoever." And, according to a recent survey conducted by the Fur Industry Council of America, seven in 10 American women feel they should have the right to wear fur.

To help make an informed decision, consumers should know the following:

- Of the furs sold today, 75 percent come from animals that are raised on fur farms specifically for that reason; 65 percent of these are mink.

- The furs that are from animals raised on farms are mink, foxes, chinchilla, nutria and some sables. All other furs are "wild furs."

- "Wild furs" are those that have been trapped. According to Steve Gold, Director of Saga Furs of Scandinavia, regulations insure that traps must be checked within every 24 hours.

"One of the biggest criti-

cisms of trapping is that animals are left in traps to suffer, and that's not the case," says Gold whose organization accounts for 50 percent of mink in the world market and 80 percent of fox. "How much difference does it make," retorts my daughter, "if the animal suffers 12 hours instead of 36?"

- Oldham and others say animals on fur farms are kept in cages, stacked on top of

each other, in a state of terror. The Fur Farm Animal Welfare Coalition in St. Paul, Minn., says that "good nutrition, comfortable housing and prompt veterinary care have resulted in domestic animals very well suited to the farm environment."

The debate continues.

- Giorgio Armani never designed furs. Bill Blass defected four seasons ago. Today, 45 designer names are carried by North American fur manufacturers. Twelve years ago, there was one: Oscar de la Renta.

- Fake furs have become a fashion alternative. Matteo Fabra, owner of Tissavel, a fake fur manufacturer based in France, which supplies Blass, Armani, Karl Lagerfeld and others, says, "From 1988 to 1990, we doubled sales to the United States."

According to Gold, "Fake fur hasn't impacted on the overall market at all." According to designer Oldham, "Fake fur is a wonderful tribute to these beautiful animals."

Just last weekend, my son discovered my first leather jacket.

"Did you buy this, Mom?" he asked.

My answer: "Where does it all end, son?"

"Just ask yourself this Mom," he replied, "did it come from love?" (NEA)

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