

Chiquérrimo!

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There are varying degrees of chic in Rio de Janeiro. Just as the long sprawl of Ipanema Beach is divided into various sections - or postos - attracting different groups of people, so the business of beach-wear is differentiated.

Nowhere was this more obvious than at last month's Fashion Rio event, where the spring/summer 2009 swimwear season was under way. Offering a sneak preview as to what the rest of the world will be wearing in a year's time, the show saw fashion-forward Brazilian beachwear kiss goodbye to its populist-chic tanga history and strut down the catwalk into the realm of beach couture.

Designers focused on the kind of swimwear made to be seen in - as opposed to swim in. Fabrics were draped to fall like jersey and shapes mimicked evening wear silhouettes, with luxuriously double-layered cowl necklines on maillots. Even more importantly, designers turned to filling the growing niche for post-beach dressing with a rich variety of pieces from maxi-dresses to jewels.

"We sell a huge number of what we call 'cover-ups' - sales of which are currently bigger than bikinis," says Judith Harris, a buyer for New York department store Henri Bendel who was attending the Rio shows. "More and more of us are wanting to carry on the beach lifestyle away from the shore - I guess you could call it après-beach wear, just like après-ski," says Harris.

"Chiquerrimo," one front-row guest at the upscale Lenny Niemeyer show was heard to murmur in a low, appreciative Carioca drawl ("sheek-a-heee-mo"), denoting the kind of chic that is almost too much, as a parade of golden glamazons covered in coconut-scented fake bake strolled past.

Catwalk highlights included bikini bottoms embroidered with slices of agate and one-pieces stretched and slashed across the body by Niemeyer. The Brazilian swimwear designer - known for her extraordinary annual house party, which sees high-profile guests jetting in from all over the world - also keeps tabs on her customers' more down-to-earth requirements.

"I'm designing more ready-to-wear because clients are asking for an alternative to bikinis," she says. "In Rio, summer runs year-round - it's a city with a beach. Usually, we go to the beach and drop in on friends at home. When you want to go out to eat you have to be dressed - and not just in a pareo. That said, I have customers in Sao Paulo and in the south of Brazil and they still want to buy my label in the winter season as well. So I am focusing on clothes to wear after the sun goes down, including lightweight knits and trousers."

At diminutive designer Luiza Bonadiman's show, conceptual swimwear was deconstructed with bikinis delicately unpinned at one edge to reveal another style underneath. Elsewhere in the collection, couture-sized ruffles appeared on one-pieces and not-so-casual cover-ups.

Likewise, at the Salinas show the brand's usual upbeat patterns and dangling charms were replaced by a more sophisticated focus on delicate, fluid and transparent fabrics. Here, the predominantly aqua palette was shot through with hot pink and yellow and topped with a sprinkling of Swarovski crystals.

Fonte: Financial Times, London, July. 19/July. 20 2008. Life & Artes. p. 9.