

Reynold Pearce and Andrew Fionda

Designers who are putting the buzz back into British fashion. Photograph by Richard Croft



THE CLOTHES SHOW recently showed a crop of two young men looking dazed but stoned as they faced the camera. They were Reynold Pearce and Andrew Fionda. Days before, they had been hard-working but unheard-of designers, beavering away at their first collection. And then came London Fashion Week. As Pearce Fionda's designs — black and white, glamorous and evocative of the Forties — were sauntered down the catwalk, press and buyers sat up and recognised sharp new talent of the sort destined to put the buzz back into British fashion. The clothes were witty, wearable and well made.

'They're so well trained,' said Dawn Mello, president of New York's Bergdorf Goodman. 'We come to London for great technology as well as innovative design.' She went on to stock Pearce Fionda in New York, while Neiman Marcus has it in Beverly Hills and Joyce in Hong Kong. Liberty has it here, Harvey Nichols is interested and Harrod's wanted the accessories — meant only to decorate the show. 'I think people were quite impressed,' says Fionda, 30, with charming understatement.

Mello was right about the training. There is nothing rash about

these boys, who blanch just thinking about people who embark on businesses fresh out of college. They met while doing fashion at Trent Polytechnic. (Asked about their backgrounds, Pearce says his mother is a designer, while Fionda groans and says, 'I come from Middlesbrough. I mean, we're talking shell-voins!') They were friends then, but their design outlooks were different, and on graduating they went their separate ways to gain MA's and experience: Pearce at St Martin's, John Galiano and Roland Klein, and Fionda at the Royal College of Art and — among others — Alton.

But they remained in touch and, in 1995, with a friend to back them, they decided to work together. 'We couldn't say "that's mine" or "that's his",' says Pearce, 27. 'I think in patterns and dimensions and Andrew in colour and mood.' Fionda adds, 'It's the same with business. Benny's good at accounting, I'm good at production.' And that is their next big battle, he says. 'Friends say that once the production headaches start, everything suffers, including your next collection. We're determined that's not going to happen to us.' **SERENA ALLOTT**