

TODAY'S QUOTE

"Good design keeps the user happy, the manufacturer in the black and the aesthete unoffended."
Raymond Loewy

See spot

Consumers are signing on the dotted line for polka-dot fashions, rugs, sheets and more. The classic graphic is back again in bolder prints and vibrant colors.

By Megan H. Chan *Star Tribune Staff Writer*

What's cute, curvy and cool couture? Polka dots. And consumers are gobbling up the versatile spots on everything from toilet brushes to high-end frocks. Dots are finding favor with designers galore and appealing to hip teens and those in their 20s as well as the young at heart. "It's almost like a neutral [print]. I think it's something that's universally liked. Very few people are like, 'Oh, I hate a polka dot,'" said New York fashion designer Shoshanna Lonstein Gruss, known for her Shoshanna line of lingerie and swimsuits. The term "polka dot" first appeared in the 1880s when both the dots and the dance were especially popular. French designer Coco Chanel favored dots in the 1920s and such 1950s glamour queens as Marilyn Monroe flaunted the print while housewives across America donned delicate, evenly spaced dots in "Leave It to Beaver" bliss. In the '60s, "Itsy Bitsy Teenie Weenie Yellow Polka Dot Bikini" became a pop-song dot anthem; the puffed sleeves of the 1980s found themselves splotted by the likes of revolutionary American designer Geoffrey Beene. Today's dots have a bolder vibe. With loud colors and a retro feel, they are more colorful, playful and graphic. "Somehow those dots are so bubbly they're like champagne," said Carolyn Sollis, style director of House and Garden magazine. "They're young. They're surprising. They're so unsophisticated, they're sophisticated, if you know what I mean." Marilyn DeLong, curator of the Goldstein Museum of Design in St. Paul, said the polka-dot revival could be related to our current obsession with youth. "In the 1800s, the goal wasn't to look young. You really have to look to the 20th century to see the exploitation of polka dots," said DeLong, who is also the assistant dean of the Design, Housing and Apparel Department at the University of Minnesota. Many think that dots project a youthful quality. "I think it's more of a younger thing because it's more carefree," said Kristin Harris, 17, of Plymouth, a member of the Mall of America's teen advisory board. "When I think of polka dots, I think fun, prancing around and really girly."

DOTS continues on E5

Your brain on dots

With more than 10 percent of gray matter dedicated to processing vision, the brain has a lot to say about what we see. "[Vision] is very important to us. It occupies a large part of the brain, and so it's natural for us; we think in terms of vision," said Dr. Geoffrey Ghose, assistant professor of neuroscience at the University of Minnesota. Researchers have found that people receive visual data in dots. After data from our eyes travels through the optic nerve to the primary visual cortex in the back of the brain, specialized neurons, or brain cells, are programmed to react to spots of light. As the information is processed to higher visual areas of the brain, these neurons connect the dots. Specialized neurons piece the dots into lines, lines into intersections, and so on. "The best example is pointillism," Ghose said. "If you get very close to a [Georges Pierre] Seurat painting, you see a bunch of dots, but as you back away you're integrating those images to arrive at images of dresses and umbrellas. It's a simple case where the information hasn't changed, but when you change the scale, you see something completely different."

Teens apply high-tech high pressure

By Alex Williams
New York Times

Last Christmas, Kristi Stangeland, a mother of two who lives in Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y., made a grievous mistake: She bought her 14-year-old daughter, Erika Hinman, the wrong MP3 player.

"I tried to get away with getting her an MP3 player that was \$100 cheaper," Stangeland explained sheepishly.

"I was in the biggest dog

box," she said, recalling Erika's crestfallen response. "She went to school, and everyone else had got an iPod for Christmas. It was like, 'How come everyone else got one, and you couldn't buy me an iPod?' So we got one for her birthday two months later."

While teenagers once coveted \$100 sneakers and jeans (arguably necessities because, after all, they are clothes), the must-have items now — iPods, cell phones with cameras, and portable DVD players — are high-tech, constantly in need

of upgrade and can cost up to \$500 each. These items are increasingly out of reach for most high school students, so the wish list is passed on to mom and dad.

Researchers who study child behavior use the terms "nag factor" or "pester power" to describe how young children, in whom advertising has planted a desire for junk food or toys, lobby their parents. Now the same pestering is reaching a fever pitch among teenagers. "It's a good reason never

to grow up," said Cary Silvers, vice president for consumer trends at Roper Youth Report, a nationwide poll from NOP World, a consumer research firm, which recently found that 18 percent of boys aged 13 to 17 surveyed owned an MP3 player, and that 37 percent owned a DVD player. But only 10 percent of the teenagers had a job, and on average they netted only \$29 a week.

SPENDING continues on E4: — "Parents are really struggling."

INSIDE

AI Sichernman

Uncle AI is a little bit surprised at who's starring in the new movie "Bewitched." Maybe that's because he has no idea of who anybody is.

Turn to E4.

Who's hurt who?

A reader discovers his wife's infidelity and wants to know if he should quietly disappear to make life easier for her. Abby advises him to rethink the situation. **Turn to E9.**

TOMORROW

A last-minute 'Companion'

Carpenters are hammering. Stars are gathering. And the script is in flux. It's "Prairie Home Companion," the movie.

Comics E6-E7

Soap Opera Update E8

Crosswords/bridge E9

Dear Abby, Fixit E9
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