

Get Creative

Kids' wear - from infants to pre-teens - is looking more and more like what you see at retail, and that means kids want to wear logos and other decorated apparel.

BY KATHERINE SCHNEIDER



On Kelsey and Birdie, 100% polyester micro-chenille hooded robes, great for after the bath or pool. On Joely, a 100% polyester scalloped-edge, hooded jacket with contrasting knit trim. Hooded jacket (CC6368) in kiss-white and children's robes (CC6367) in kiss-white. Available from Colorado Trading & Clothing (asi/45792; RSN #120)

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, consumers spent \$7.5 billion just on back-to-school shopping in 2007. While parents or guardians picked up most of the tabs for those bills, they weren't necessarily choosing the clothing. In a departure from traditional fall shopping trips, kids were weighing in more on their wardrobes and oftentimes, showing shrewd fashion sense.

Simply put, the days of parents forcing kids to wear hand-me-down clothing has been replaced with picking up the latest styles. "From new babies up to teenagers, there's more of a market [in children's wear] than with adults," says Diane Ostrow, owner of Ostrow Originals. "People are spending phenomenal amounts of

money on their children."

For example, Barb Burcham, owner of Ad-Specialties & More Limited (asi/113357), added to a hospital program bodysuits for newborns, and also items for the gift shop, including baby items imprinted with "Grandma's Little Angel," "Little Bundle of Joy" and other slogans to make the items even more appealing to relatives eager to spend on the newest family member.

Children's sheer numbers may be a reason behind the large impact they're making on back-to-school sales. According to recent figures, there were 15,000 more children born in 2007 than during the peak of the post-war era baby boom in 1957. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 56 million students are expected to start school in grades K-12 in fall 2008.

GET COMFORTABLE

The trends for this coming school year are comfy tops, raw-edge seams, shirts that are composed of two or more layers, and

Statistics at a Glance

\$10.6 billion: Money spent on girls' clothing in 2007, up 23% from 2002

\$11 billion: Money spent on infant and toddler clothing in 2007

45%: Percentage of back-to-school budgets spent on clothing and accessories

\$440: The average amount spent per family on back-to-school items; a 7% increase over 2003

Source:
www.informat.com

overall layered ensembles. And, cotton is the material of the season. "Traditionally, 100% cotton is the most popular fabric for infant and toddler wear. One of the growing offerings to this age group is combed ringspun cotton," says Mindy Anastos of LAT Sportswear (*asi/65948*).

Older girls are going for sheer cotton that can be layered, says Nicole Britt, national account executive with Bella (*asi/39590*). "We always have high expectations, but it's been amazing to see our sheer jersey collection doing extremely well in so many different markets. We're seeing them in airports, worn by cheerleaders and at family reunion barbecues," Britt says.

Parents are also looking for moisture-wicking and performance fabrics for their little athletes, but there's still not a huge selection out there yet. "There's not a tremendous amount out there for kids, but I think we'll go in that direction," Ostrow says.

BRIGHT IDEAS

The folks at Crayola and members of the children's wear industry are in agreement on the subject of color: Kids can't get enough of it. For the older kids, "Camouflage is hot; I'm seeing it in long sleeves to short sleeves and in tones of pink and blue. Designs are not true to the military; they're hitting different color schemes," says Tom Vann, CEO, Target Graphics Ltd. (*asi/90549*). And, Morey Mayeri, president of

Royal Apparel (*asi/83731*), sees more vibrant colors, including oranges, purples and kelly green.

Some of these same colors are appearing in the toddler market, only in softer tones. "Traditionally, primary colors do very well in the toddler segment of the market and blue, pink, banana (soft yellow) and mint (soft green) do very well in the infant market," Anastos says. "Also, we do very well with black. This is now a popular basic color for infant and toddlers." Retro color combinations of pink and brown, and blue and brown are also getting more popular. "Retro is just hot. People are snapping these color combos up," Ostrow says.

For girls, longer-length, torso-enhancing tops are king. For all types of clothing, though, Ostrow is seeing more requests for multifunctional wear. More and more children want tees and pants with lots of pockets, which make perfect places to stash cell phones, iPods and portable video games. "Kids are looking for clothing that's functional," Ostrow says. "The more places they have to put stuff, the more stuff they can take with them."

GET BLINGIN'

Texture is king, whether it's puff ink or embroidery, high-density gels, or combinations of print and embroidery. "Texture is hot," Vann says. With so much of the world's focus on going green, soft and environmentally friendly inks are also trendy, not to mention earth responsible.

Just about every child likes color and pizzazz, so it's not surprising that sparkle in the form of rhinestones and metallic threads are requested very often. Be careful not to create choking hazards when you're applying them, however.

Edgier designs are popular too. Ostrow says she frequently is called upon to embellish older kids' clothing with embroidery that more resembles tattoos than teddy bears. "They want something funky. They don't want something classic," Ostrow says. Often, looks for younger children reflect the teen market's preferences.



On Abby, Kandel's Pegasus design, composed of 8,000 stitches, has a white fill and four color changes. Combed ringspun cotton baby-rib, double-ruflle T-shirt (3338) in white and turquoise, available from LAT Sportswear (*asi/65948*; RSN #122). 100% jersey cotton shorts (0256-000) available from Kavio! (*asi/64152*; RSN #123).



On Shane, this 50% cotton/50% poly kelly green hoodie was embroidered with his last name on the front and first name on the sleeve. Using a soccer ball appliqué, Kandel placed the large sports-themed design in the center of the chest. Available from S&S Activewear (*asi/84358*; RSN #121).

All embroidery done by Cheryl Kandel, owner of Stitch Art Studio in Joshua Tree, CA (www.stitchartstudio.com).



These lightweight sweats (8316-Lights) were personalized with Abby's name on the leg. Kandel used a hummingbird because it was "cutesy" and wanted to use something other than a furry creature. From NES Clothing Co. (asi/72808; RSN #124).

"They're the same looks filtered down, but safer and not so dark," Vann says.

In keeping with bright color schemes, tie-dye is also making a reappearance. "I'm seeing more and more available from a variety of manufacturers," Vann says. Even paisley is making a comeback, experts say, as are stripes, wash-and-wear T-shirts with a single initial appliqué in a fun print fabric and direct-to-garment prints, random printing and odd shapes. "Prints are all over the board," Mayeri says.

There's also a large market for kids' wear decorated with sports-related themes. It's not unusual to see little Johnny or Kate donning colors from mom's or dad's alma mater, Britt says. "People like to outfit their children in something that they care about," she says. "Children are a great representation of what we are." ●

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When positioning the lettering down the side of the pant leg, Kandel ran into some difficulty placing her hoop. "If the pants were any smaller, the hoop wouldn't have fit," she says. Tank (9080) and 100% cotton combed ringspun fleece knit pants (9017) from Bella (asi/39590; RSN #125).

Pitfalls and Advice

Decorating small-sized children's clothing can be enough to give any embroiderer or screen printer a monstrous-sized headache. Unfortunately, there are still some pitfalls out there that can't be thwarted just yet. We talked to a couple of embroiderers and asked them to share their biggest challenges with us. Here's what they said:

✦ **It's a small world.** Jennifer Suits, owner of Sew Happy Baby, says her biggest challenge is decorating onesies. "They are so tiny, that it takes a lot of time to get them lined up correctly," she says.

Diane Ostrow, owner of Ostrow Originals, agrees. "It's difficult to digitize a name on a 0-6 month size sweater," she says. In search of the perfect placement chart, she has scoured the Internet to no avail. "Nobody has addressed that issue for children's apparel," she says. "Where a logo goes for an adult size extra-large isn't the same as for a child." Ostrow has coped by creating her own chart, but still wishes standardized requirements were available.

✦ **Quality is key.** While higher-quality fabrics are in demand more than ever before, there's another reason besides marketability that you should go with a sturdier fabric, Ostrow says. A choice of fabric will also affect the placement and durability of your designs.

In the past, embroiderers have looked to cheaper fabrics in order to make a larger profit on their children's pieces. Ostrow says those methods just don't cut it anymore. "Those fabrics don't embroider the same; you have to employ complex stabilization techniques," she says. And, "When you start having to add a stabilizer, you're losing profit." Plus, cheaper fabrics shrink. "People don't want to purchase something that gets so faded out or shrunken," she says.



This playful pup stock design came in colors that complemented the pink piping on this hoodie. "I didn't want to jeopardize the use of the pockets by sewing through them, so I placed the paw prints on the back of the jacket," Kandel says. Toddler fleece zippered hoodie (3396), available from LAT Sportswear (asi/65948; RSN #122), and navy skort (0208-000) from Kavio! (asi/64152; RSN #123).



Kandel loved the simplicity of the whaling image, which already complimented the shirt's ruffles; she added "Jr. Explorer" to make this shirt even more kid-friendly. Double-ruffle T-shirt (3338) from LAT Sportswear (asi/65948; RSN #122); white skort (0256-000) from Kavio! (asi/64152; RSN #123).



Kandel took an unusual approach to this baby bucket hat in creating the design so it can be seen when the rim of the hat is flipped up. Bella sun hat (160) from Sportsman Cap Network (asi/88877; RSN #126); cotton two-tone raglan hooded sweatshirt (110) from Bella (asi/39590; RSN #125); toddler shorts (8306) from LAT Sportswear (asi/65948; RSN #122).



Using local desert tortoises, an endangered species, Kandel designed this hoodie and creeper set. 100% organic creeper (2004) from LAT Sportswear (asi/65948; RSN #122); micro-fleece bear hoodie jacket (9807T) in butter from Landway International Corp. (asi/66238; RSN #127).

CASE STUDY: Satin Quilt Queen

Diane Ostrow, owner of Ostrow Originals, had a customer who wanted her to embroider a large number of cut satin squares with children's names or initials, some of which were script font, with others in block font. The job was ongoing, she says, with different colors and sizes of satin squares and different names or initials for each square.

The customer wanted to take the cut-and-embroidered squares and make them into quilts by combining them with other cut-material squares. "Those little satin squares were a huge challenge – satin is a

nasty material to work with even when it's already made into an article of clothing – let alone when it's just a fraying cut square piece and particularly with different fonts being used," she says.

After a frantic search online and posting questions on embroidery-related message boards, she was even more confused. "Every person had different recommendations. Some said to only use ball-point needles – others said to only use sharps," Ostrow says. "Some said to use tear-away backing; others said to use cut-away backing.

Some said to loosen up the density of the embroidery – others said to tighten it up," she says.

"It was incredibly confusing and frustrating trying to sort through all the conflicting information," she says. "I tried every method offered to me, and nothing worked well or consistently. Finally I abandoned everyone else's recommendations and decided to create my own 'recipe' for stabilizing and embroidering that I could easily replicate. It took me about two weeks, but I did finally come up with a fool-proof stabilizing recipe for satin."

Luckily, the client loved the results, as did her customers for the finished quilts. Ironically, the entire challenge came about while Ostrow was filling in for another embroiderer who was away on vacation. "When that embroiderer returned, the client requested me to please share my 'recipe' with her regular embroiderer because she much preferred the way my satin squares came out. Good thing the embroiderer I was filling in for is a dear friend of mine or it might have been a very uncomfortable situation," Ostrow says with a laugh.