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COLDSET COLOUR SUPPLEMENT OF THE YEAR

## LOOK GOOD IN THEORY



● "Raffi" jumper, €195, "Ivy" shirt, €195, "Tara" trousers, €230 (jumper not available in BTs)  
● "Garrison B" jacket, €310, "Jonnie" T-shirt, €50 and "Janetta W" skirt, €195  
● "Kat" top, €100, "Paz" shorts, €175

The US brand Theory, known for its good fit and fabric quality, is proving a hit with Irish women, writes **Deirdre McQuillan**



making inexpensive dresses. The company's fortunes were transformed when it started to manufacture the famous Brooke Shields jeans for Calvin Klein in the 1980s. Before starting Theory in 1997 with a partner, Rosen had headed Puritan, taking over the company from his father at the age of 26 and selling it for \$75 million to Klein in March 1984.

A former chief executive of Anne Klein, his idea for Theory was to dress the modern woman in clean silhouettes and uncomplicated lines, free of unnecessary detail. This was a common enough ambition, cleverly realised. "I believed that the future of the clothing business lay in Lycra, so in the beginning, we wove it into the fabric of every single piece of clothing ... we understood a woman's lifestyle and need for versatility. Now our natural versus synthetic fibre ratio is 85 per cent to 15 per cent."

Like the Spanish company, Zara, he also took a modern approach to marketing. Theory does not advertise or stage fashion shows, and only recently started to use models for its "look" book. Avoiding hype has kept it safe in the risky waters of fashion, where labels can rise and fall as quickly as a trouser leg shape, and though its profile may be low-key, its profits are accelerating. Sales are expected to grow to \$300 million this year and though the company was sold last autumn to Japanese interests, Rosen remains president. According to a recent article in the *New York Times*, he doesn't read *Women's Wear Daily* or fashion magazines. He prefers horse racing, and is the owner of more than two dozen thoroughbreds. He hasn't had a Derby winner yet, but if he does, its name will certainly be Theory.

"Lite Recover", incidentally, is a fabric consisting of 64 per cent cotton, 29 per cent nylon and seven per cent elastane, according to *Theory Dictionary*, a novel little booklet outlining styles and fabrics which customers receive with each purchase. ♦

Theory is available exclusively in Brown Thomas

**H**ave you tried "Max in Lite Recover"? Or "Walden"? Or is your preference for "Maxime"? If these names mean nothing to you yet, it's not surprising. For thousands of stylish US women, however, they are a coded sartorial language charged with meaning. Welcome to Theory, the cult fashion brand associated with stylish, streamlined clothes. The brand's success is based on good fit and quality fabrics, with each style christened with names such as those listed above, and word of mouth recommendation. Theory made its name initially for its five different styles of trousers. The Max C remains its most popular, an easy trouser with flared legs and back pockets which die-hard fans buy in every colour and fabric, apparently.

It has become hugely successful in the US and Japan, and now Irish women are putting Theory to the test. The brand is starting to take up more space in Brown Thomas, which gave it a trial run last season. It doesn't shout designer. There is nothing that marks it out in a floor filled with clothes, but if you look closely, feel the fabrics, judge the finish and proportions, the quality is unmistakable. More importantly, with trousers around €220 and T-shirts €50, the prices are not too scary. The current season's fabrics, for example, include fine Italian wool/cotton mixes, Swiss lawn cottons and stretch linens. In addition, US sizing, two sizes down from ours, means that if you're size 12, you need to look for size eight, if you are 10, size six and so forth.

Theory was started seven years ago by Andrew Rosen, a third generation member of a Seventh Avenue garment industry family, whose grandfather founded a business in 1910 called Puritan Fashion,