



Faux or No?

By Elana Ashanti Jefferson, Denver Post staff writer

Fashion fans will notice a surge in fur and shearling coats, jackets, accessories and trims this year. Thanks to manufacturing innovations, these pelts have become easier for designers to work with and for consumers to wear. The trickle-down effect means there is also an abundance of faux fur, shearling and leather styles showing in stores.

“One of the biggest trends is using fur as fabric,” says Leonard McCants, ready-to-wear editor for the trade paper *Women’s Wear Daily*. “Designers have sheared it, dyed it and knitted it to make it more lightweight and easier to wear.” The result has been “hipper and trendier” fur and shearling styles, including pelts that are lime green, sky blue and canary yellow. “This isn’t your grandmother’s fur coat,” McCants says.

This fall, the “fur as fabric” trend extends beyond such high-end designers as Oscar de la Renta, Michael Kors and Ann Demeulemeester. Moderately priced stores such as Express, Banana Republic, The Gap, Old Navy, J. Crew and Betsey Johnson also are stocking real and faux fur, leather and shearling. They’ve got coats and jackets, along with one look of the moment: fur collars and cuffs.

When it comes to real versus faux, style lines are blurring. Irene McKnight, a Denver image consultant, says shorter fur styles are generally more casual, contemporary and classic, while longer styles are more dramatic. “Fur can go from very dressed up and formal, all the way down to blue jeans,” she says.

But can a fashionista make the same bold statement in faux that she does in real fur? Before breaking down fur fashion, there are a few things we can say about both real and faux.

Both are stylish. High-end design companies such as Gucci and Dolce & Gabbana generally work with real fur. But equally respected labels such as Chloe and St. John are presenting faux fur that’s just as lovely as the real thing. Decades ago, when faux fur fabrication was in its infancy, the result was a scratchy, monkey-hair-looking interpretation that

many in the fashion world turned their noses up at. Today, pieces such as St. John’s faux leopard spot vest or Ralph Lauren’s faux shearling coats are just as cuddly and coveted as real fur.

Both are political. Animal-rights advocates believe animals should have the same rights as humans. To them, wearing leather, fur, suede or shearling promotes animal suffering. Furriers and those who wear it, on the other hand, believe this view is extreme. Many of them support a philosophy known as “animal welfare,” which argues for the responsible, humane farming of animals (including fuzzy minks and chinchillas), to satisfy basic human needs such as food and clothing.

To reinforce their viewpoints, those interested in animal rights can refer to websites such as cowsarecool.com. For the animal welfare perspective, check out www.furcommission.com.

Faux Fun

The explosion of faux fur, shearling and leather looks means more choices for people who want fabulous fur style without the fabulous price.

Also, many of the new faux styles are machine washable, or at least dry-cleanable. That makes them easier to care for than real fur, which requires specialized cleaning and temperature-controlled storage.

“There are so many faux alternatives for people,” says Eulanda Sanders, assistant professor in the fashion design and merchandising department at Colorado State University. “Modern faux fabrications are very similar to real fur. That gives people the option of going either way.”

With the low cost of faux, it’s easy to buy a trendy look like a faux shearling or fur vest. Banana Republic, for instance, is stocked with fun faux fur hats for men and women, along with whimsical faux fur handbags. Prices are in the \$100 range.

Stores such as Bebe, Guess and Arden B. are selling faux fur jackets and vests, along with faux fur trimmed coats and sweaters in various colors.

“We’re at a time in fashion when people want more embellishment,” Sanders says. “With all the new colorations and embossing, you can get some really unique things in faux fur.”

The Real Thing

The best thing about real fur is the luxury.

“Fur is something that’s warm, comfortable, and makes people feel good,” says McCants of Women’s Wear Daily. “Having a fur piece against your neck or your ears really makes you feel fantastic.”

Real fur is warmer and softer than faux, and there’s a certain status that comes with wearing it.

“You know when it’s real,” McCants says. “It gives off that wealthy appeal.”

In other words, buying a fur coat is an investment.

Wearing it makes you look and feel prosperous. On the lower end pricewise, a Trilogy fur collar is \$110 at Neiman Marcus, and a mink ascot from Michael Kors \$795. Prices go up from there, such as the cross-cut tuxedo collar mink by Blackglama photographed for this story, available for \$6,000 at Saks Fifth Avenue.

Fur can be re-cut, which is good news for anyone who owns a beautiful but dated hand-me-down. Grandma’s restyled mink or sable might make a snazzy vest, or fun, feminine collar and cuffs on a new cashmere sweater or wool coat. Any store that sells real fur, such as Auer’s, Saks Fifth Avenue or Neiman Marcus, can refer you to a tailor that re-cuts old furs, and some retailers sponsor events at which such services are available.