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This fall the wet suit looks even better on the town

By Cheryl Fenton | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT OCTOBER 23, 2013

A surfer wouldn't dream of tackling icy waters without the cozy cocoon of a neoprene wet suit. This synthetic rubber material is form-fitting and resilient, not to mention warm and water-resistant.

It is also the surprise star of the fashion season, with top designers taking the fabric out of the water and putting it on the runways. With its strong and defined lines, spongy neoprene creates architectural shapes with a futuristic finish.



A model wears neoprene at an Emporio Armani fashion show.





A neoprene dress from DKNY, \$595.

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Further distancing neoprene from its typical sporty use, designers are fashioning bonded versions by fusing it with brushed felt, wool, and velvet.

From 3.1 Phillip Lim's sweatshirts to J Brand's 801 Scuba jeans, casual becomes, surprisingly, a bit more refined with neoprene. T by Alexander Wang's pleated skirt and Faith Connection's butterfly-print dress take the next step into formal wear, while the material's flexibility is celebrated in Reed Krakoff's leather and neoprene ankle boots and Emporio Armani's boots in PVC and neoprene velvet.

"Neoprene is body sculptural. It adds shape to the garment and moves with the body," says Jane Chung, executive vice president of design for DKNY. "It adds an element of sport, taking basics and making them modern."

It's also a versatile fabric with a lot of dimensions.

"Cut in a sleek jacket, it can look sporty," says Kristen Uekermann, style watcher and founder of TheBoston

Fashionista.com. "As an architectural dress, it looks futuristic. As a pencil skirt, it can look sleek and sophisticated, and as skinny pants it looks sexy and modern."

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Uekermann has been eyeing the sculptural iridescent seamed waist dress by Cynthia Rowley for her own closet. Rowley, the uncrowned queen of neoprene, has long loved surfing so using the wet-suit material in her line was a natural transition. Futuristic and funky but still wearable, the bonded stretch leggings are her latest neoprene style gambit.

Giorgio Armani is getting his feet wet with his first use of neoprene. Emporio Armani's AW13 Kajal collection is full of exciting structure for men and women. Local style expert Erica Corsano recently cohosted a fashion show at the store's Copley Place location that featured rough-cut neoprene bonded with velvet in deep green, aubergine, and ruby skirts, peacoats, and dresses.

“I like the form-hugging fit it creates. It can be quite ladylike when used for a feminine, curve-hugging dress,” she says of the material. “It’s a sporty material, so it makes sense that designers would also use it for sporty looks for men.”

The material isn’t going away anytime soon. Several designers, including John Galliano and Pucci showed it on the runways for their Spring 2014 collections.

“In a world of trends that are simply ridiculous for everyday life in the real world, this is a trend that Bostonians can easily embrace,” says Uekermann. “Neoprene is comfortable, warm, and, when cut into classic shapes, easy to wear and style.”

Cheryl Fenton can be reached at Cheryl@CherylFenton.com.