



INSIDER



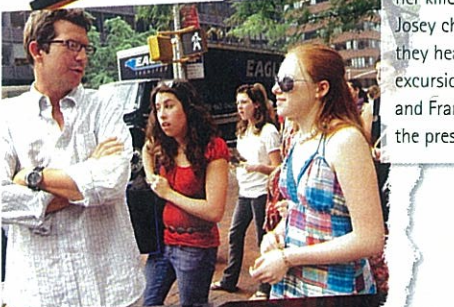
SHOPPING



DRESS MAKING



KILLER HEELS



ON ANOTHER EXCURSION



JUDGING THE PRESENTATIONS

FROM TOP The girls search for beauty and fashion inspiration; A department store excursion; Students are taught about different fabrics and draping; Eden Bellow, 15, shows off her killer heels; Gordon Josey chats to campers as they head out on another excursion; Cindy Bryant (left) and Fran Della Badia judge the presentations.

# This ONE time...

at

*fashion*

Camp



## STORY BOARDS

FORGET SINGALONGS AND SACK RACES. SUMMER CAMP IN THE US HAS MOVED THE CLASSROOM TO THE MALL. BY **REBECCA WALLWORK**. PHOTOGRAPHY BY **LISA CARPENTER**

It's the dog days of summer in sticky Manhattan but the air inside department store Bergdorf Goodman is crisp, cool and luxurious, just like the merchandise. Clusters of teenage girls stalk the racks, scanning quickly but surely, chatting to each other while concentrating on the task at hand. Overhearing snatches of their conversation – "Oh my god, it's only \$180 for this t-shirt! That's, like, such a bargain. You have to buy it!" – fellow shoppers would be forgiven for mistaking the girls for a group of spoiled kids let loose with daddy's credit card on their summer holiday. Which is only partly right – but they're not all rich and they're not all making purchases today. What they're doing is studying. That's right – Bergdorf's as the modern-day classroom. Welcome to Fashion Camp, NYC.

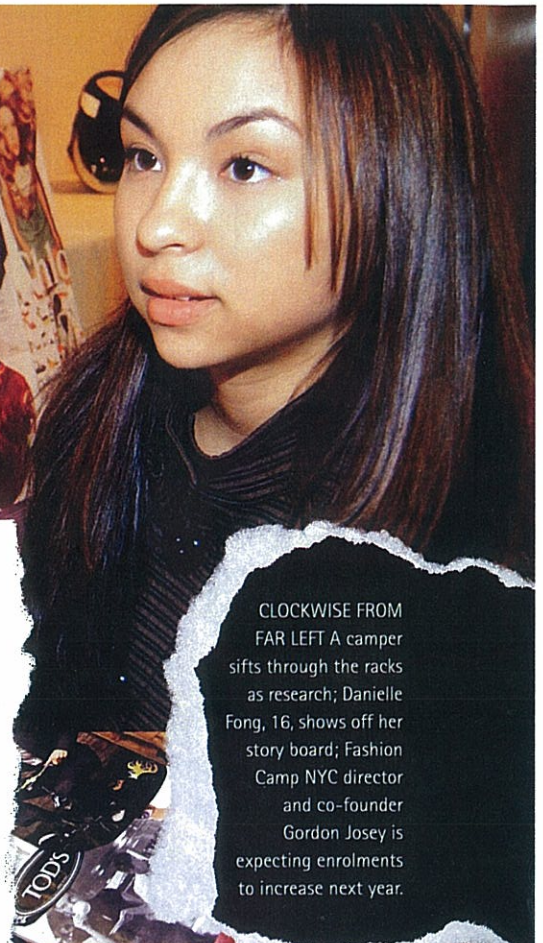
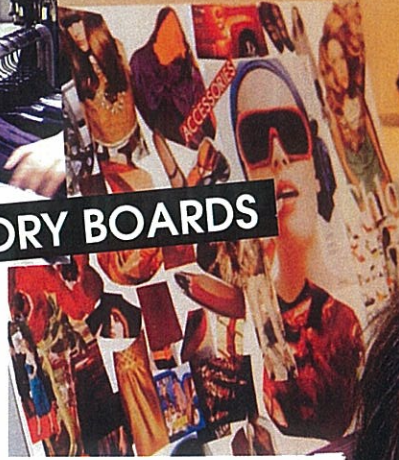
Summer camps, of course, have long been a tradition in the US, but in recent years the stereotypical camp (wood cabins, canoeing and sing-a-longs) has been supplanted by a growing number of niche camps – specialising in everything from maths to Jesus, with band camp somewhere in between. But this year, for the first time, fashion camp was on offer – seven days in New York City crammed with seminars, guest lectures, brand exercises and store visits. The course tuition for such sartorial schooling is \$1,300 per camper, not including accommodation or travel to New York. A quick poll among the 35 students showed it was their parents who footed the bill, with most out-of-towners staying with relatives or with their parents in a hotel – hardly a budget friendly summer diversion. And the camp's director, Gordon Josey, expects even higher numbers next year.

The headquarters near Grand Central Station in Midtown Manhattan are located in a generic convention centre, but there's no mistaking which room houses fashion camp. It's the one with the dog-eared copies of *US Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* stacked on the tables and swatches of fabric dangling from the curtains. Large noticeboards covered in clippings – ads for fashion and beauty products, pictures of celebrities – are propped up in every corner. Right now, they look little more than random mish-mashes of bright colour, but by the end of the week their purpose will become clear. What these seemingly frivolous collages will reveal about their creators is that – to borrow a phrase from Gwen Stefani's song, "Harajuku Girls" – Girl, they've got style.

That's the first thing the photographer and I notice. Neither of us can remember having a clue about fashion when we were that age. Even the youngest of the "campers", at 13 and 14, are confidently rocking cute outfits. The older ones, in their late teens, look fabulous and ready to take on the world. There are lots of Coach handbags, and I spot one girl with a Marc Jacobs Faridah Hobo over her shoulder. I have the same bag, and agonised over the \$540 price tag for weeks before succumbing to temptation and eventually buying it for less on eBay.

When I was 16, a splurge was a logo t-shirt from Sportsgirl to wear with baggy shorts. Trends were adopted and discarded en masse; there was no cultivation of a personal look. Style was something women much older than me had – supermodels, with big hair and daring minis, or businesswomen in sexy, tailored suits. It wasn't something I'd begin to think of having for myself. But fashion camp girls all have a sense of style, and they're not alone. Take a look around at your local shopping centre. When did the kids of today get so damn fashionable?

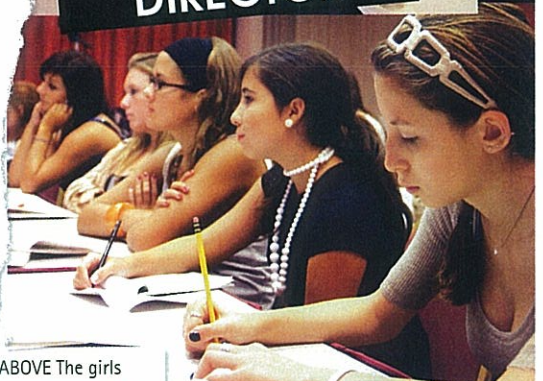
Fran Della Badia – vice president of merchandising at Coach, who founded fashion camp with her husband Gordon Josey, (he also runs a traditional summer camp) – is just as amazed. "This week has really brought home the global reach of fashion – and beauty, too. It's not just the clothes. There are girls from all over →



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT A camper sifts through the racks as research; Danielle Fong, 16, shows off her story board; Fashion Camp NYC director and co-founder Gordon Josey is expecting enrolments to increase next year.



## DIRECTOR



ABOVE The girls eagerly take notes as they listen to guest speakers.

RIGHT Danielle Fong and Shara Anderson examine designs in store.

