

## Fashion Forward

Stores try to ease difficulty of finding unique clothes

BY EMILY HARRELL  
The Battalion

Flying in the face of the traditional conservative, khaki-colored fashion sense of Bryan-College Station has been a challenge for those who choose to stray from the beaten catwalk.

After thrift store fare had been picked clean, Bryan-College Station stores offered few shopping choices for the consumer in search of alternatives.

Fortunately, shops in the area are beginning to respond to the needs of the not-so-average shopper.

"[Consumers] are definitely getting trendier," Kim Faucher, manager of Post Oak's Gap store, said. "They're definitely into the fads, even the layering. A few years ago, it seemed that all people wanted to wear were jeans and T-shirts, but now some of our alternative items are doing better."

Hot Topic's store manager Daniel Griffin said he thinks that the community's emphasis on tradition gives the area's fashion a conservative overtone.

"There is, in general, a lot of conservatism, and I think that's tied to the fact that there is so much tradition here," he said.

"People are used to going to certain places and wearing certain types of clothes, and I think that's part of the tradition. If we were to get a bad response or a bad opinion, as far as looks go, that is why we would get it," Griffin said.

Misti Reeves, Gadzooks employee and a sophomore agricultural development major, said the conservatism of College Station's fashion community is a result of conservatism in the area's social community.

"I think there's a lot of fashion here, there's just not a lot of places to express that fashion," she said.

"Like all the clubs and bars are pretty conservative. There's nowhere to get

dressed up and go," Reeves said. "Going down Sixth Street in Austin, the little leather skirts and shorts for girls would be fine, but here you wouldn't wear that stuff to the Dixie Chicken or [Hurricane] Harry's," she said.

**"People just look at fashion differently here. A lot of people look down on the trendier clothes."**

— Misti Reeves  
Gadzooks employee

Reeves said the conservative look that prevails in College Station has kept some from walking on the wild side of fashion.

"Wearing a lot of the girls' clothes, like the backless things and strappy shirts, in this town, people would be like, 'what a slut,' when it's really just really cute," she said.

Leilani Steffan, another Gadzooks employee said she thinks that the risk of being insulted is not the only reason people avoid dressing differently.

"I think also a lot of people don't really want to stand out in the crowd. Some people are more comfortable in the things that blend in with everyone," she said.

"People just look at fashion differently here. A lot of people look down on the trendier clothes. I admire the people that go ahead and wear that stuff," Reeves said.

Despite College Station's generally conservative look, mall employees said the addition of Hot Topic to Post Oak's relatively tame atmosphere has opened consumers to a wider variety of styles showing that, in this case, diversity gives more opportunities to the consumer.

"All our clothes are music related. We do a lot of the club scenes with the huge, fat pants. All we do is poke fun of labels. Everything in here, for

the most part, is just safe, fun stuff," Griffin said.

He said some consumers come into the store with a negative attitude but that their impression changes once they have had a look around.

"One time, a Christian youth minister came in the store, and at first he wasn't happy with some of the merchandise. But after he found out that our merchandise is all based on popular music and popular culture, his opinion of the store changed. He actually mailed a letter of recommendation to the CEO of the company," Griffin said.

"Where Gadzooks was once the extreme, now we're the extreme."

Hot Topic, boasting an array of vinyl evening gowns, trendy music, and pop-culture paraphernalia, is beginning to draw the fashionably creative out of the woodwork and into College Station's retail stores. Gadzooks, known for its trendy merchandise and zealous staff, has enjoyed Hot Topic's gothic shadow.

"I think it's great, because before people were afraid to buy our stuff because they thought it was too crazy. Now with Hot Topic in the mall, they see that our stuff is not really so crazy," Reeves said. "More people with the whole gothic look have started to come [to Gadzooks]. Also, a lot of people that were more conservative have gotten where they like the trendier clothes since Hot Topic has come in."

Faucher said exposure to the wild styles at Hot Topic has allowed other stores to carry trendier merchandise. "The new thing is colored denim. We [Gap] carry embellished khakis. I admire the people that go ahead and wear that stuff," Reeves said.

Whereas the average college student here was only interested in the basic jeans, khakis and T-shirts. Now they are more likely to buy the things that before were not necessities," she said.

"We have a lot of people that are shopping at Gadzooks and Hot Topic, and then they come in here and pick up the things that are a little trendier. Whereas before they might have come in and said, 'There's nothing here for me,' we think finally they are able to find something here," Faucher said.



EMILY HARRELL/THE BATTALION

Touchstone Pictures



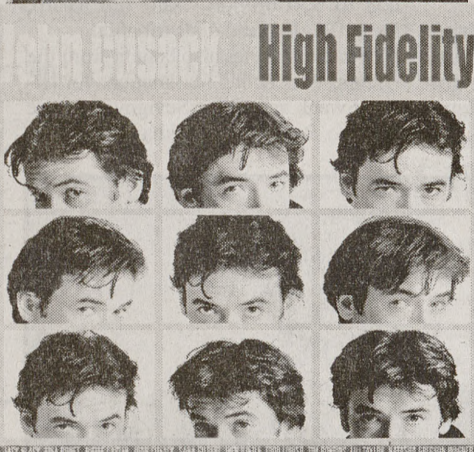
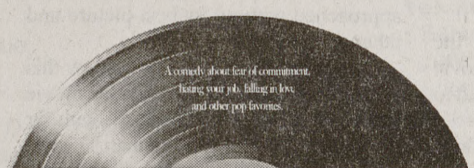
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**Polling Sites:** 9 a.m.–5 p.m. March 29 & 30  
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