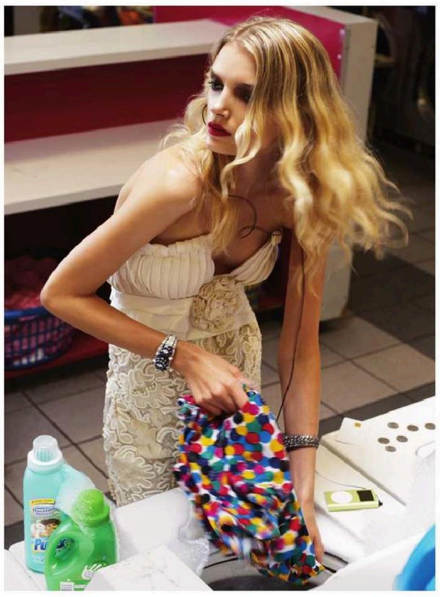
put it in a mesh bag on the delicate cycle, using a wool-and-cashmere shampoo, air-dried and then steamed it." The result? A jacket as new as the day it was bought. Dermatologist Lisa Airan, M.D., is just as fearless, throwing Givenchy wool pants, a Lanvin silk dress, and mixed-media Sacai tops—all of which come with DRY CLEAN ONLY labels—into the wash. So how are so many women defying the care instructions when manufacturers are labeling newly developed textiles with more caution than ever? The answer, as Airan will tell you, starts with a highly intelligent washing machine. (Hers is a Miele Touchtronic W1113.)

Which is why I find myself one morning in Manhattan's Midtown East at the showroom of German home-appliance expert Miele, peering inside what could be the best fashion investment women make this season. Where washing machines of yore offered little beyond standard hot and cold cycles, the state-of-the-art models in Miele's showroom come with enough programs to rival the latest MacBook Pro. The company's W3033 machine features a patented technology known as Intelligent Water Intake, which regulates water levels for an entire load down to a single slip dress, so not a drop is wasted. (Like other brands, Miele is working toward greener technology.) There's one setting gentler on clothes than the softest human touch. "We want fashion to be livable," says Miele rep Skyler Stevenson, tossing a dozen freshly cut roses into the machine. Twenty minutes later the flowers are completely unscathed, as if each petal has been cleaned by the Lilliputian hand of some fabled laundry fairy.



A NEW SPIN
THE LATEST MACHINES ARE EQUIPPED WITH SETTINGS MORE DELICATE THAN HAND-WASHING. PHOTOGRAPHED BY STEVEN MEISEL.

Technological advances aside, caring for a modern wardrobe requires a little higher learning on fabric content. Textile experts Lindsey Boyd and Gwen Whiting of fabric-care company the Laundress have the practice down to a science. "A lot of people call us because their dry cleaner has turned them away," says Whiting, a former designer at Ralph Lauren Home who, like Boyd, studied fiber science at Cornell. "The fact is, 90 percent of your wardrobe is actually washable." Boyd and Whiting abide by the fundamental principles of fiber, which boil the contents of your closet down to three categories: "the absolute no-nos," including fur; "the unpredictables," like viscose rayon, which may shrink in water; and the rest—cashmere, silk, wool, polyester—which are pretty much fair game. Besides the environmental incentives, there is one benefit that washing clothes will always have over dry-cleaning. "That freshly laundered smell that I get when I open up my closet and drawers," says Whiting. "It really is wonderful."—CHIOMA NNADI



STEPPING STONES

When Irene Neuwirth buckled into a pair of Esquivel's color-blocked Karlie sandals for a sojourn to Hawaii last December, she returned home with one persistent thought: "What would it be like to treat these flats like jewelry?" Until now, Neuwirth's instinct for adornment has been reserved for more northern parts (earrings, pendants, and rings), but she's since traveled south with a collaboration with friend and fellow Angeleno George Esquivel. The glimmering results take the current mood for ornamentation—scattered across pretty much everything at Louis Vuitton, Prada, and Chanel—down to the feet.

It's an extravagant and graphic update on the traditional idea of a bejeweled sandal. That said, Esquivel is quick to add, "We were never going to put 500 stones on them. They have to stay true to who we both are." Where the CFDA/*Vogue* Fashion Fund alumni found common ground was by merging Neuwirth's ethereal gobstoppers (peach moonstone, onyx, and chrysoprase) with Esquivel's perforated-leather details and cushioned foot beds. Each of the three pairs in this collection, which took the designers close to nine months to imagine, takes Californian artisans between ten and 20 hours to assemble (metallic hues are hand-burnished, and each slice of bijou is diligently secured with hand-wrapped gold-wire casing). Says Neuwirth, "They're casual *and* luxurious."—E.A.

view >252

CHANGE OF PACE
CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: ESQUIVEL (2009) AND NEUWIRTH (2008) IN *VOGUE*. ESQUIVEL IRENE NEUWIRTH SANDALS, $1,200; BARNEYS NEW YORK, NYC.

NORMAN JEAN ROY (2); STILL LIFES: TIM HOUT.