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Fur lightens up for next season Extreme designs in casual styles are aimed at young customers

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Photo Caption: CP PHOTOS: FUR STORY: Above, Maryse Roye's patchwork fur design. Right, Jean-Francois Morissette's hooded coat. Far right, sheared coyote and raccoon.

MONTREAL - There were Inuit throat singers and drummers. Northern lights. Images of the land of snow and ice. And furs were everywhere.

Models in basic-black catsuits working the showrooms and the runways changed outfits regularly, displaying furs, shearlings and leathers, fur-trimmed outerwear and accessories.

This melding of sights, sounds and looks was part of the new-millennium look in fur designs presented at the recent North American Fur and Fashion Exposition and at the trade-fashion show gala.

Extreme looks accented the more than two dozen scenes at one fashion show, which pitted long fit-and-flare coats against shorter, often hooded, more casual toppers. There were also flashes of muted colour and unfamiliar textures. Consumers will see lighter fur fashions in stores later this year. Many will have larger shoulder pads that fly against the trend in regular clothes towards barely-there padding.

Fur has to be updated to attract a new, younger consumer, says fashion consultant Richard H. of Paris. "There is certainly a market for classic glamorous furs, but the retail potential resides in a more youthful and casual style, better adapted to the pared-down wardrobe of the modern woman."

The four-day trade exposition featured seminar guests including retailer Rokie Bernstein, Vogue fashion forecaster Ed Menicheschi, marketing expert **Kevin Graff** and Richard H.

Looks in fur design included Luxe with silver fox, Nouvelle Couture with sheared beaver, Urban Chic with sheared coyote, and colours like moss green, urban khaki and yellows.

Fur technicians from the SAGA International Design Centre in Denmark demonstrated the latest fur-working techniques to an audience that included Montreal retailer Caroline Labelle of Labelle Fourrures.

Montreal designers featured in the fur fashion show and graduates of the SAGA training program are Sandra Comeau of Ode et Sann, Marisa Minicucci of Zenobia, Jean-Francois Morissette, Maryse Roye of Pino Furs and Nadya Toto.

The next group of designers going to Denmark later this year includes Ross Mayer, Ewa Majak, David Dixon and Stephan Caras, all of Toronto, along with Feizal Virani of Vancouver.