



CRITICAL SHOPPER

# Baby Steps to a Label-Obsessed Life



Photographs by Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times

## FASHION ENVY

At Yoya, the children's boutique in the West Village, the commonly heard refrain is: "I wish they made these for adults."

By HORACIO SILVA  
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I DON'T have children of my own. But as an uncle and the former editor of a children's fashion magazine, I would like to think I have an honorary high-chair's view of the world of kiddie couture. I've witnessed child models, encouraged by stage moms who would scare even Dakota Fanning, walk me through their portfolios. And companies have tried to sell me on the most unconscionable designs, including itsy-bitsy pumps that made little girls look like pole dancers in training heels.

### Yoya

636 Hudson Street (corner of Horatio Street); (646) 336-6844

*ATMOSPHERE* More Perry Street penthouse than Sesame Street playhouse.

*SERVICE* As knowledgeable and patient as the Super

But I've never met a 3-year-old who likes cerebral Euro-minimalism. The children I know tend to be bling-obsessed little attention-seekers who prefer to wade in the Baby Phat end of the kiddie pool. Most boys are happy to make a fashion statement in gear that can be accessorized with, say, the contents of a ketchup bottle, and girls are similarly easy to please: tomboys aside, little princesses are content in anything that makes them look like fairies (extra points for skirts that twirl when dancing).

It goes without saying, then, that I'm suspicious of parents who view their kids as fashion plates, especially those who deck them out in expensive shrunken versions of runway

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Nanny.

**KEY ITEMS** Scaled-down adult fashions; some of the cutest kid's shoes in town; mini-Mies modernist furniture.

**PRICES** Some pocket-size prices, **like Itsi Bitsi bibs (\$12)** and Jellycat toys (from \$26), but mostly big-ticket items for noble little savages.

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trends. (I'm aware that over the centuries, children have been dressed like miniature adults, but I'm with Rousseau, who embraced the individuality and playfulness of children.) So it was with more than a little apprehension that I walked into Yoya, the perennially popular boutique for newborns to 8-year-olds, which stocks scaled-down versions of adult clothes for parents who want their rug rats to think Barney is a store.

Opened five years ago, when the West Village wasn't the stroller-derby that it is today — and before the advent of children's designer lines like Little Marc and on-trend magazines like Milk and Cookie — Yoya stands out among children's boutiques like a toddler in a Prada turban. For starters, there is a bouncer on weekends (imagine the fisticuffs over limited-edition onesies!) and there is a glaring lack of color in this land that Fisher-Price forgot, both on the walls and on the racks.

My uneasiness was not pacified by the table in the middle of the store that included Mor Mor Rita gold booties (\$115) that looked like a nod to the metallic shoes at Balenciaga. Or by the utilitarian Bon Point gray jacket with a hoodie (\$166) that could have been from Raf Simons. By the time I came across a pair of fashionably tapered Lit'l Earnie jeans (\$140) from the hipster denim label Earnest Sewn, I thought I was going to have to buy a burp cloth (\$25).

But trawl through the well-stocked racks and you will dig up a refreshing number of finds, some of them colorful, by labels like Megan Park, Lucy Sykes and Eye Spy that will be familiar to any yummy-mummy. (The selection borders on overwhelming, even with the help of the incredibly patient staff. It is not surprising that the owners opened Yoyamart, a cool dad-friendly, gadget-heavy store a sock monkey's throw away on Gansevoort Street.)

A Petit Bateau striped T-shirt dress is a good buy at \$45 and easy enough for little girls to slip on by themselves. Bon Point cotton knickers (\$55), which look like something Chris Evert would have worn in the '70s, can be popped under any skirt or teamed with a tee in summer. And as my cool-mom shopping accomplice assured me, "They keep everything in."



Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times

There is also a smart but affordable in-house line, including hand-loomed Tunisian fabrics (\$75), which can serve as stroller blankets or throws for the beach house, and directional multiculti Bernous sweaters (\$95). It is little wonder that one of the most overheard comments in the store is, “I wish they made these for adults.”

Admittedly, some of the stock, including a too-too-cute pair of Pom d’Api sandals with silver appliquéd flowers (\$115) and a Marni-esque dress by Tocca Bambini (\$150), is a tad expensive for everyday wear. But there isn’t a grandparent or gay uncle who would not shell out that much for a

special occasion.

Some of the prices, however, are as silly as a Baby Einstein video. A Fendi-like metallic diaper bag by the aptly named Not Rational, which attaches to a stroller and comes with a matching changing mat, is simply too expensive at \$600. I’m going out on a limb here, but anyone who can spend that much on a diaper bag is probably not changing the nappies.

The book selection is small but fun and focuses on the ankle-biter canon: Madeline, Peter Pan, Babar. There are other old-school throwbacks like the Eebo coloring books that come with a tin of 24 colored pencils (\$40 for the set), perfect for temperamental little artists who can destroy a Crayola box in seconds.

Some of the toys, like the Happy to See You dolls by Pénélope (\$275), which come with handmade cashmere coats, jeans and even underwear, appear to be aimed at crazed doll collectors rather than children. A better option is the menagerie of Jellycat cuddle toys (\$26). My 5-year-old friend Scarlett swears by their softness.

Not so cuddly is the midcentury-modern-looking furniture that would seem to be designed for the nearby [Richard Meier](#) towers. The pieces are undeniably chic, especially those by David Netto (the John Pawson of the nursery set) and Ooba, whose Eames-like bassinette (\$600) could be part of [MoMA](#)’s permanent collection.

But what kid wants a bedroom to be a showcase for mini-Mies masterpieces? And by force-feeding children good taste, instead of allowing their My Little Pony moments of vulgarity, are parents starving them of self-expression? It’s one thing to deny children candy, but another thing altogether to rule out eye candy. At the end of the day, the only Scandinavian flavor your average 5-year-old cares about comes in a cone at Häagen-Dazs.

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