use a guerrilla approach, hoping to create a stir on a very limited budget. They dress creative friends on the New York and London club circuit until the word about the clothes spreads to some stylist and, say, Madonna wears their outfit in a video. Then, fashion followers will call retailers demanding the look.

That's how it worked for Lesley Sealey, the London-based designer of a label named i.e.uniform, which utilizes reflective trims to spruce up ordinary denim. After starting the line four years ago in a friend's apartment, Ms. Sealey bartered some pants for chains from a jewelry designer to wear to the East End clubs she frequents. Soon, her denims caught on with artists and young fashion types in the clubs, eventually capturing the attention of an avant-garde designer, Marjan Pejoski, who made a gift of a red fleece i.e.uniform jacket to Bjork.

Another club-savvy stylist who spotted the line dressed Madonna in a pair of Ms. Sealey's gray slacks for an ad campaign. The singer liked the slacks so much that she took them and later wore them in a video for "Beautiful Strangers" from the movie "Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me."

Such exposure "goes a long, long way" to help build a business, said Ms. Sealey, 31, who this year won an award for best street style from the British Fashion Council. "Everyone is looking to Bjork and Madonna for style direction. They are leaders."

Call it grass-roots promotion, the building of a hip brand by getting it into the wardrobes of scene makers. That encourages word of mouth that eventually reaches retailers, fashion journalists and customers. The fashion world has numerous examples of the practice.

Zac Posen, a 20-year-old New Yorker currently studying at St. Martin's College of Art and Design in London, already counts among his clients the actress Claire Danes and the model Naomi Campbell. They took an interest after Lola Schnabel, a daughter of the artist Julian Schnabel and Mr. Posen's childhood friend, started wearing his body-hugging bohemian dresses to Manhattan and London parties.

At a recent rooftop party, Mr. Posen danced with a young woman dressed in a pink ruffled cocktail dress of his own creation. "This dress is old," he said. "You should see what I'm doing now."

Julie Gilhart, vice president of fashion merchandising at Barneys New York, said such guerrilla marketing — providing clothes for free to stylish and visible friends — can have more of an impact on customers and retailers than conventional advertising. "It works," she said. "It comes off seeming like you're being less manipulated."

The latest practitioner of clubland marketing is Matthew Williamson, a British designer of some standing — his clothes are in Barneys and Scoop in New York, and he has staged

Building a hip brand by stirring the pot.

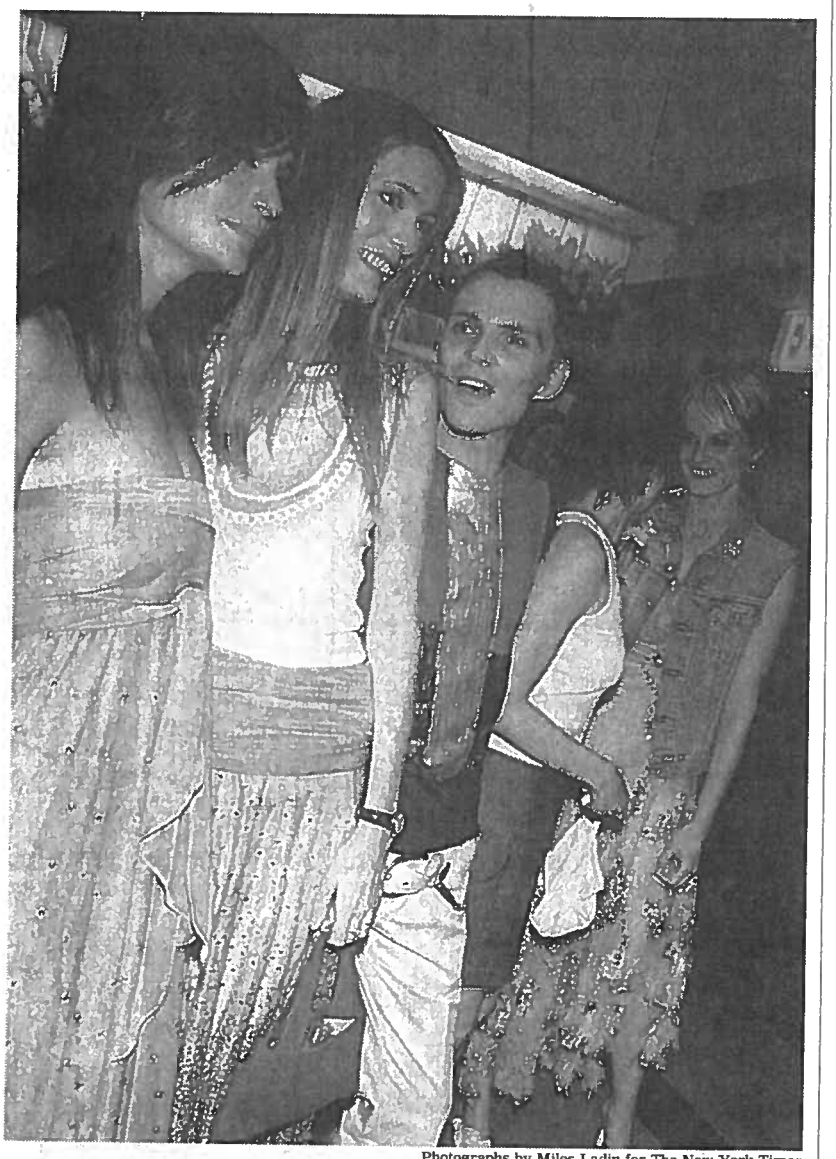
London runway shows — who has arrived in no small part because of whom he has managed to dress.

Mr. Williamson's career was given its initial boost in 1996 when Jade Jagger posed in his silver organza A-line skirt for Tatler magazine and liked it so much that she took it home. Feeling guilty, she wrote Mr. Williamson an apology. After a period of correspondence, the designer insisted they meet. Ms. Jagger, a daughter of Mick Jagger and in those days a notorious London party girl, soon became a kind of muse to Mr. Williamson.

Mr. Williamson dressed for his New York coming-out party in a fuchsia tank top and pink pants that he had found that day at Patricia Field on East Eighth Street. Ms. Frost was accompanied by her husband, the actor Jude Law, who had worn an olive cashmere sweater by Mr. Williamson that morning on "The Today Show" while promoting his film "A.I."

As waitresses circulated with Champagne, grilled chicken and shrimp, Ms. Christensen, who was in town from Denmark to shoot a feature for Casa Vogue, said that she liked Mr. Williamson's clothes, but more, she liked him. "The first time I did his show I wanted to hang out with him," she said. "We just clicked right away. We share the same ironies. And it doesn't hurt that he designs clothes I'm crazy about. They are walking kaleidoscopes of color."

For Ms. Moss, it was simpler. "I like black, more classic things," she said. "He's a friend of mine. It's a British thing."



Photographs by Miles Ladin for The New York Times

ALIGNED Mr. Williamson with his hostesses: Helena Christensen, far left, Plum Sykes and Amber Valletta, far right, who are wearing his designs.