

Doo-Ri  
Chung



**FASHION: From the basement of a dry cleaner's to the big time.**

BY HOLLY PETERSON

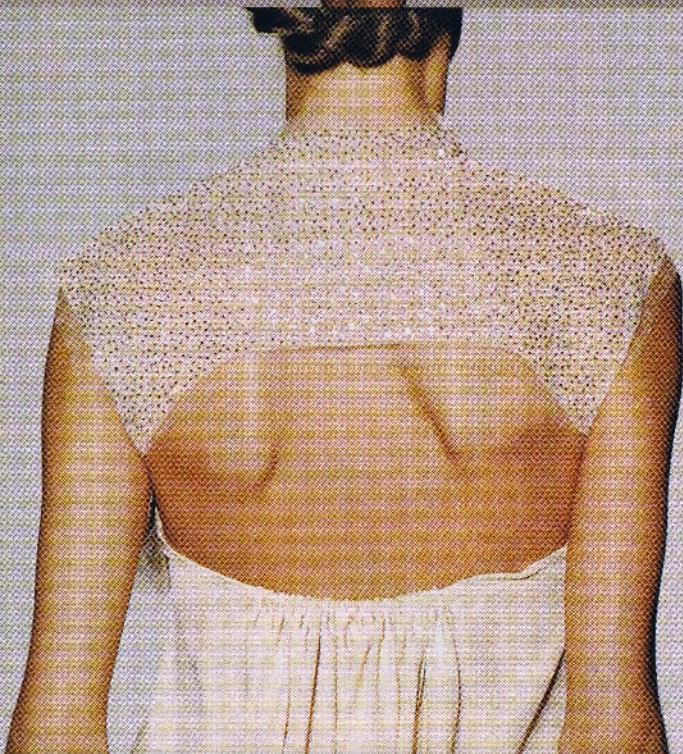
**A**mid the breezy bossa nova music and the clicking of socialites' heels, designer Doo-Ri Chung did some final fiddling to make the strings of Swarovski crystals hang

just so down the back of a halter gown. Then the model walked onto the runway to roll out Chung's fall 2005 show. It was only her fourth collection, but a certain woman with dark glasses sat dead center in the front row: Anna Wintour, the editor of *Vogue*. Hers is the face that launches a thousand orders; her presence means a show *matters*.

Since that September show, big-time stores have been calling: Nordstrom's, Neiman Marcus, the hyperchic Louis of Boston. "Clothes can transform the way a woman feels about herself,"

says Chung, 32. "Great clothing will do that." She compares her clothes to three-dimensional sculpture: her designs are soft, flowing, diaphanous—yet they maintain a clear architectural form. "I like to build a jersey out so that you feel like it's hugging you, but you've got six yards of fabric enveloping you," she says. "You see the shape of a woman's form but it's not tight."

After graduating from Parsons School of Design in 1995, Chung apprenticed for six years with Geoffrey Beene, eventually becoming his head designer. After learning from the master



Runway best  
seller from the  
September show

sculptor, she started her own business in the basement of her Korean parents' dry-cleaning store in Saddle Brook, N.J. Her mother and father, she says, taught her the value of hard work and perseverance, though they shielded her from the family's financial hardships when she was a child. "I think every immigrant from my parents' generation has the same story, you know? It's that selflessness."

Obviously, family values paid off—and gave Chung some cachet. "She's special because her career is like the libretto of an opera," says Stan

Herman, president of the Council of Fashion Designers of America. "She's the little seamstress in New Jersey who sat at her machine and produced wondrous clothes that all the sophisticated people in New York loved right from the start." It wasn't her story that made Chung a finalist for the Vogue/CFDA Fashion Fund Award last year, but it didn't hurt.

Even though she recently moved her business smack into the center of Manhattan's fashion district, Chung is nostalgic about that four-year period in her parents' basement. "It

was so much easier when I was designing in obscurity," she says now, "because I had this time to really grow. Now there is so much more scrutiny. People take apart my clothes and ask what direction I'm going. But I still do everything: draping, cutting, sewing. Anything that has been presented in a show, my hand has touched." Chung says her look remains "a work in progress. I can't nail down my style. It took Mr. Beene 30 years to be who he was." Give the girl some time. But after a first act like hers, she won't need much.