

Fashion 87

'New Couture' Offers Old World Services

By MARY ROURKE, *Times Staff Writer*

For people who always find just what they want – but in the wrong size – or just what they need – but in the wrong color – a new type of shop is becoming popular. The category doesn't have a name that fits, exactly. But retailers are calling it "the new couture."



Custom deep forest green jacket is from Susanna Beverly Hills, one of the burgeoning "new couture" shops.



At Susanna Beverly Hills, Susanna Chung Forest surveys her workroom, above. The artfully shaped swing coatdress at right, trimmed in satin, is from her shop.

Susanna Chung Forest, owner of Susanna Beverly Hills, remembers one recent call by a woman who was carrying her cold-weather clothes while travelling on business in wintry London. From there she decided to go on to hot, dry Australia and needed another wardrobe. "My fall collection was in the store," Chung Forest begins. "But I made her several outfits in summer fabrics and had them waiting for her when she arrived in Australia."

Ninety percent of Chung Forest's business is special order, and most of her customers are travelling executives, she says. One of her full-time staff does nothing but keep her supplied with the range of fabrics for hot and cold climates she works with year round.

She styles classic jackets and skirts, perfectly finished, in top quality fabrics. Instead of corporate gray or black, she shows untraditional colors, such as lemon yellow, hunter green and royal blue. "I want my lady judges to take off their black robes and show off a red dress underneath," she says.

Often she repeats a design from season to season, and she expects customers to wear their purchases for seven years or more. She says the key to long-term designs is: "Don't pay attention to fashion."

Her straight-cut skirts are knee length; she calls anything shorter ridiculous. "What do you do with a miniskirt three years from



now when it's out, not the trend?" she asks.

Ankle-length riding skirts, fitted through the hips, are out of style right now, she notes. But Chung Forest still shows them in her store. "They are to wear with boots and a big cashmere sweater for travel," she says.

Several of her dresses, with matching jackets piped in contrasting colors, were originally for Cybill Shepherd to wear on "Moonlighting," she says. Other of her high-profile clients include a professional race-car driver and a television network president.

Her prices for daytime outfits are about \$1,200. Many of her evening clothes are the identical styles, made in dressy fabrics. ■