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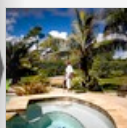
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# At Oktoberfest, a Controversy Brews Over Racy Designer Dirndls

*Fancy-Pants Lederhosen Also Irk Purists; 'It's Become Like Mardi Gras—It's Appalling'*

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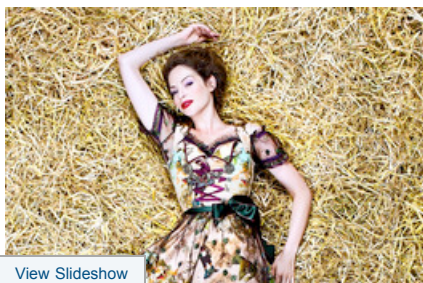
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By PATRICK MCGROARTY

MUNICH—Surrounded by the bratwurst stands and beer wagons of Oktoberfest, Alexandra Coroian, a 24-year-old Romanian in pigtails, pulls at the ruffle of her short scarlet dirndl, exposing a black lace petticoat underneath.

"I really like these costumes," she says, demonstrating how she hacked off the bottom half of the traditional dress. "I think I'll wear it many more times. It looks so nice."

## The Dirndl's New Look



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CREDIT: Martin Nink

A model wears a dirndl created by Lola Paltinger as part of her most recent 2010 collection.

Long the preserve of fräuleins and Alpine cultural enthusiasts, dirndls and lederhosen have become an international fashion trend in recent years, inspiring ever bolder iterations that purists say are transforming their proud heritage into a vulgar caricature.

The front line of this battle runs through the Wiesn, the 100-acre fairgrounds in the center of Munich that is home to Oktoberfest, the city's 17-day fete of beer, wurst and schnapps that is marking its 200th anniversary this year.

Critics say the Wiesn has warped from a quaint Volksfest into a cultural wasteland: women in lederhosen, the occasional man in a dirndl, and celebrities such as Kim Kardashian and Paris Hilton flaunting designer renditions that cost thousands of dollars.

"It's become like Mardi Gras—it's appalling," says Ursula Fröhmer, a Munich tailor who specializes in the authentic Germanic folk costumes known as *tracht*.

And the style is catching on far from Munich,

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with lederhosen made for women turning up in recent collections by designers such as Yves Saint Laurent and Alice + Olivia.

Lederhosen are the short leather breeches, often with matching suspenders, associated broadly with Germany, though they are unique to Bavaria and other areas of the Alps. The female equivalent is the dirndl, a knee-to-floor-length dress with a tight bodice that accentuates a woman's chest. Both styles were famously worn by the cast of "The Sound of Music."



Standing amid racks of dirndls and bolts of cloth in the shop she inherited from her father, Ms. Fröhmer sums up her frustration at the spectacle Oktoberfest has become with a singular German word: *fremdschämen*, a term that evokes a feeling of cringing embarrassment for the actions of others.

"I'm overcome with *fremdschämen*, and I'm ashamed that I'm from Bavaria when I see things like that," Ms. Fröhmer says.

True *tracht* is rooted in the traditional peasant dress of Austria and Bavaria. The colors, design and embroidery differ by region and town.

To the untrained eye, the distinction between the braided red-and-green wool shirt of a Tyrolean mountain man and the dark silk and wool city clothes worn by Munich townspeople hardly registers. Traditionalists fear their regional garb is being obscured by tourists and designers appropriating cotton and even plastic versions of their beloved clothing.

"Imagine that you had five friends, and they all wore red sneakers," says Simone Egger, an anthropologist at the University of Munich who studied the increasing popularity of *tracht* at Oktoberfest. "Then everybody starts wearing red sneakers. They're exasperated. They say, 'We were doing this first, and we wear them the right way.' It's a lot like that."

Public enemy No. 1 for this group is Lola Paltinger, a Munich transplant who grew up well outside Germany's *tracht* belt in the western German city of Mannheim. Ms. Paltinger creates dirndls from unorthodox fabrics such as leather that are sometimes cut shorter than the standard knee-to-ankle range.

Even though the styles now considered "traditional" evolved from simpler rural garb when *tracht* was adopted by well-heeled city folks in the late 19th century, Ms. Paltinger's creations have many Bavarians up in arms.

"Oh, God!" Hildegard Hoffmann exclaims at the mention of Ms. Paltinger's name. Ms. Hoffmann is secretary of the Bavarian Tracht Organization, whose slogan is "Tracht is Culture."

"I'd like to go see Lola Paltinger wearing these clothes," says Ms. Hoffmann, pinching the heavy silk sleeve of her black ankle-length dress, typical of Munich's well-to-do 120 years ago.

Ms. Hoffmann and her husband attend *tracht* conventions in Germany and beyond to help keep the tradition alive. But they are largely powerless against the rising tide of trend-hungry tourists and ambitious designers like Ms. Paltinger.

Ms. Paltinger's premier collection is called Lollipop und Alpenrock, a lyrical pun in which the final word means "Alpine skirt" and also refers to a musical genre that mixes rock 'n' roll with Germanic folk music.

The designer says her dirndls are inspired by "a carefree *joie de vivre*, a playful romanticism and a touch of humorously delirious drama."

*Tracht* enthusiasts like Ms. Hoffmann worry that dresses by Ms. Paltinger or designer Christine Huber—who cuts dirndl skirts from Indian saris and fabric emblazoned with Bambi—will obfuscate the link between the dress and its origins.

"You know, I appreciate and like those people that are doing the traditional styles," says Ms.

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Paltinger. "But I, for myself, I have to do something else and something different."

She says the reason for the dirndl's appeal to the fashion set, or to anyone for that matter, is clear.

"Men love to see dirndls on their women," she says. "All men love dirndls and love the décolletage of their wives or their girlfriends, because it's really sexy."

The 550 dresses she makes each year sell for up to \$4,000 each. Business, she says, has grown steadily since she started a decade ago. From her sixth-floor showroom down the street from Munich's Isar Gate, she now regularly outfits Munich's power set and celebrities.

Isabel Edvardsson, a native Swede and judge on Germany's version of "Dancing with the Stars," was recently in Ms. Paltinger's boutique to find a show-stopping outfit for an Oktoberfest beer-tent party.

Ms. Edvardsson fingered a string of brass pendants dangling from the rhinestone-studded bodice of the embroidered green linen dirndl she chose. The outfit had to be special since the event would draw "80% of all the famous people in Germany—at least," she said. "You can't go there with just a normal dirndl."

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