

1-10-92

LOS ANGELES TIMES



SCREEN STYLE

Fabric of Truth

THE MOVIE: "JFK"

THE SET-UP: New Orleans Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison (Kevin Costner, pictured) investigates the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, digging up a rogues' gallery of tipsters, witnesses and assorted suspects, despite the objections of his wife, Liz (Sissy Spacek).

THE LOOK: In the early '60s, few American women were immune to the fashion power of former First Lady Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy. In "JFK," the First Lady trickle-down factor gets applied to no-frills Southern housewife Liz Garrison, who even opts for the ultimate Jackie symbol, a pert pillbox hat. Both Liz Garrison and Asst. Dist. Atty. Susie Cox (Laurie Metcalf) wear a succession of neat suits with short boxy jackets and slim skirts, typical of fashionable women of the era. Other women appearing briefly on camera, including eyewitnesses to the assassination, simply pay homage to the pretty dress (remember them?). In particular, they all seem to like dresses in oversized-floral prints shaped into fitted silhouettes. Costume designer Marlene Stewart decided to avoid an abundance of period-piece jewelry and accessories, which was wise. Such frou-frou would distract from the intensity of the film.

All characters, male and female, dress in a subdued palette. Pale colors, of course, are a Southern staple, but also contribute to the film's sepia-toned documentary edge. Costner as Garrison looks geeky but sincere in his black horn-rimmed glasses and wardrobe of tan, seersucker and pale green suits as well as short-brimmed hats characteristic of the era. (Stewart says Costner wears 25 different green suits, although it's impossible to detect them all on screen.) His silvery neckties are geek-wear perfection. In contrast, government types appear ominous in their dark-color uniforms. Finally, if Stewart's '90s version of the First Lady's infamous pink boucle Chanel suit, seen again and again in reviewing the Zapruder home movie of the fatal bullet shots, is a hotter pink than the original, it undeniably adds to the emotional voltage. By the way, Stewart contends that the shade is accurate.

THE SOURCES: All of Costner's and Spacek's wardrobes were custom made, including his straw dress-hats with ribbon trim. Other characters wear a mix of vintage-clothing store finds, costume rentals and new store-bought clothes. For costume jewelry enthusiasts, Spacek wears Miriam Haskell-designed earrings and necklaces circa 1940, found in a New Orleans antique store.

THE PAYOFF: Low-keyed designs that don't depend on '60s clichés.

—BETTY GOODWIN