Ford Highlights Creativity Conclave

By Kavita Daswani

LOS ANGELES — Tom Ford, sharing his thoughts on fashion and creativity, said: "Nothing made me happier than to see something that I had done copied."

Reflecting on his days at Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent, the designer said: "Appropriation has always been a trend. The clues to where we are going to be next year are here now."

Ford was among the key players from the worlds of fashion, music, entertainment and academia who gathered Saturday at the Norman Lear Center at the University of Southern California for a conference titled "Ready to Share: Fashion and the Ownership of Creativity."

The daylong event drew participants such as fashion designer Kevan Hall, vintage guru Cameron Silver, "Sex and the City" creator Michael Patrick King and music innovator T-Bone Burnett.

Mixing panel discussions with small-scale fashion demos, the conference highlighted how much of popular culture is rooted in things that have been in the public domain, and when legal protections work.

Hall, formerly Halston's design and creative director who now keeps an atelier in Los Angeles, showcased dresses from his spring-summer 2005 collection, which he conceded were derivative of the Madeleine Vionnet and Jacques Fath dresses favored by Millicent Rogers and the Duchess of Windsor, who served as his historical muses for the collection. "It's all about the gesture of the look," he said.

Silver, owner of vintage boutique Decades in L.A. and creative consultant to Paris house Azzaro, showed how an $80,000 Chanel couture jacket had been reinterpreted by numerous fashion labels.

David Wolfe, creative director of the trend and color forecasting company The Doneger Group, described fashion as "a fragile creative ecosystem." He said major future trends would include a dilution of the current obsession with "flashy, trashy, vulgar" celebrities, and an inclination toward natural beauty, purity of design and more voluminous clothing.

David Bollier, a senior fellow at the Norman Lear Center and co-founder of advocacy group Public Knowledge, said the event proved "the ecology of creativity matters at least as much as individual genius. How our access to the past interworks with the culture at large is important. Creators need to have the ability to draw from our cultural legacy."