

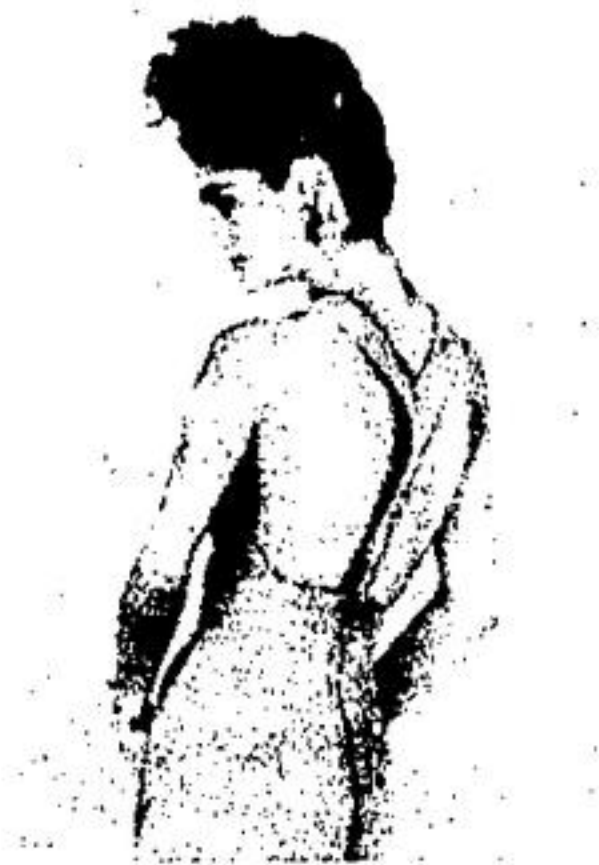
Fashion Outlook



MILITARY SNAP in bright white lambskin dress (\$425) by Michael Hoban for North Beach Leather.



PEPLUM JACKET (\$595) swirls over miniskirt (\$345) in bright colors from Lindzen Ltd.



NO-SWEAT SUEDE bares your skin for summer. Halter dress (\$520) designed by Alicia Herrera.

Fashion forecast

Wear a second skin in warm weather

FASHION



Joan Lebow

Like woolsens, leather fashions have been considered a cold-weather clothing option. But as more designers aim for "seasonless" collections, new lightweight leathers and suedes are welcome in warm-weather wardrobes.

Some of this season's hottest styles — bra tops, bustiers, mini-skirts and backless dresses — are designed in a lambskin that won't make your skin too warm as temperatures rise. For special spring and summer occasions, some women invest in elegant leather suits in bright or pastel colors.

While leather outfits demand affluent consumers, many women can indulge in leather pants, a skirt or jacket. This fashion strategy is encouraged by designers who treat animal hides as just another fabric.

"Every year we sell more leather and suedes for spring and summer. There are always new tanning developments that make working with leather and suede easier," explains leather specialist Alicia Herrera. Her second-skin dresses sell from about \$300 to \$500, and a bra top is a not-so-slimpy \$200.

New treatments and silkscreen printing add variety to leather creations. Designers like Herrera don't skimp on luxury, using "silk" leathers — thinner, more drapable skins. Another dimension is texture, such as the breezy summer tops made from perforated leather. For spring, Herrera has a "denim" leather. She also incorporates a popular spring motif — boudstooth checks — by screen-printing a dress.

"The lightweight leathers also take dye better," says Mateo Paulo, manager of New York's North Beach Leather store. When North Beach's owner Michael Hoban started designing leather clothes 20 years ago, the big sellers were heavy cowhide coats and jackets. Today's lighter leathers make skirts and blouses popular possibilities. North Beach's warm weather forecast includes ice cream colors

and sharp military detailing. Jackets cost from \$300 to \$500 and short skirts are \$175. They're also available in Hoban's shops in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, Dallas, Miami, Houston and Las Vegas, or by mail-order.

You can find moderately priced leather jackets and separates in some department and specialty stores. Expect to pay at least \$200 for a jacket and \$100 for a skirt.

Most high-quality leather garments are fashioned out of lambskin. (Occasionally, designers work with rare leathers, such as the ostrich leather that Perry Ellis, Ltd. turned into a spring suit.) Calfskin is used for shoes and accessories, and sometimes for heavier coats and jackets. Once considered inferior, inexpensive pigskin has become more supple, thanks to

tanning technology. Herrera is even considering using pigskin in a low-priced collection.

Women who object to wearing furs may have similar concerns about leather clothing. Designers claim that most skins are the byproducts of animals killed for food, and not for fashion, since the demand does not exceed supply.

If you do buy leather garments, save some money for cleaning and upkeep. Cleaning a suede dress runs from about \$45 to \$60. Highly ornamented styles may cost more. Save money and your leather wardrobe by taking some protective measures.

Gershon suggests that you spend \$15 to treat new leathers with a protective glaze. Between cleanings brush suede and leather.

THE DIAMOND ENGAGEMENT RING — THE CHOICE OF AGES

Some traditions survive in a modern world in spite of all the non-stop changes! The diamond engagement ring is an example of an important tradition ... and one that is still gaining in popularity year after year.

Although evidence of the engagement tradition dates back as far as the caveman, the Pharaohs of Egypt are believed to have originated the ring (or circle) as a symbol of eternity. Their sketches indicate the circle as a heavenly sign meaning that life, happiness and love have no beginning or end. The use of a diamond in the engagement ring setting dates back as far as ancient India where unpolished stones were used in ornamentation and gifts. It wasn't until 1477, however, that the polished diamond as we know it became the betrothal stone. Desiring to please his prospective father-in-law, Archduke Maximilian of Austria proposed to Mary of Burgundy heeding the words of a trusted advisor who wrote:

"At the betrothal your grace must have a ring set with a diamond and also a gold ring."

Cut: Although often confused with the shape of a diamond, cut refers to the precise arrangement of a diamond's facets in relation to one another. A well

cut diamond with 58 facets will allow the greatest amount of light to be reflected. A diamond that is either too deep or too shallow will cause some light to escape before it can be reflected and returned to the eye.

Clarity: This refers to the presence of inclusions - interior or exterior - in a diamond. The fewer the inclusions, the better the diamond quality, as inclusions can interfere with the passage of light through the gem. Small inclusions discerned under 10X magnification will neither mar the diamond's beauty nor harm its quality.

Colour: It is the truly colourless diamond that is the most precious, as a truly colourless diamond, like a prism, will break light into all of the colours of the rainbow, displaying its unparalleled brilliance and fire.

Carat Weight: The carat is the unit weight used for diamonds, a word devised from the carob used to balance scales in ancient times. Like cents to a dollar, there are 100 points to a carat, so that a 50 point diamond weighs 0.50 carats. One carat is also equal to 0.20 grams.

The 4Cs — your guide to diamond quality and value, throughout the ages.


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