

The American Look



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From the end of the 1930s through the 1940s, the New York fashion industry came into its own. Sportswear, which had evolved from its sporting origins to include simple casual wear for town and country, travel and leisure, was at the centre of this shift. Sportswear provided busy career women, college girls and housewives with clothes that could be worn on all occasions. Drawing on a wonderful array of sources, from fashion magazines to department store records, this book is the rich and absorbing narrative and analysis of how New York sportswear evolved to become the definitive American style and how a modern fashion aesthetic was born. The story that unfolds reveals, with the aid of some wonderful illustrations, how New York's emergent style became dynamic and modern, like the city itself, expressive of the American ideal of athletic, long-limbed women; and how it tapped into both metropolitan Americanness and the America of wide-open spaces. It explores the designers, such as Claire McCardell, Clare Potter and Tina Leser, themselves embodiments of the modern, active woman, and how they gave middle class American women New York sportswear as an alternative to Parisian-inspired designs. It looks for the first time at how its style connected not just to ideals of patriotism and democracy, but to current notions of cleanliness and hygiene, and for example, to 1930s theories of body image, and contemporary dance.

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