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good life guide

style



Retro Swimwear

the news that "retro swimwear" is making a fashion stand this season might conjure up visions of men covered from knee to elbow in heavy-knit Edwardian tank suits or something even more primordial: au naturel bathing. The former, of course, was too constrictive for much more than just a dip in the water. The latter was restricted to use when the opposite sex was not in evidence, say at the local swimming hole. And what's the point of going swimming if you can't meet women also decked out for water play. But don't worry, gentlemen, the latest styles hark to the 1950s and '60s, when the silhouette for public bathing was sensible, neither too constrictive of cloth nor exhibitionist in nature. That era distinguished itself with fabric prints used to enliven some fairly basic trunk-suit shapes. Not only did miracle fibers bring on quick-drying, wrinkle-free swimsuits, but for some reason they inspired a riot of colors and patterns.

Expect to see eye-popping patterns that include a spectrum of geometric prints, Hawaiian influences, plaids, maritime motifs, fish and other representations of animal life, mostly in hues that are anything but subtle.

We lined up a collection on a clothesline (the most retro thing we

could think of). At far left, Vilebrequin (us.vilebrequin.com) paints a tropical picture with Les Toucans, Second from left is Retromarine's (retromarine.nyc) take on Lizard Skin. Flying at second from right is Vilebrequin's V Bird. At far right, W.R.K. (available at Nordstrom's) goes with a more rustic appeal.

What you won't see this summer—probably thankfully—is too much deviation in length. The mainstay is the mid-thigh hem. The James Bond look (shorter, but not terribly tight) will also appear. Many staples of the menswear wardrobe may come from other pursuits (e.g., the riding, hunting and military styles that have made it into everyday use). But for grown men who swim it is a good rule of thumb to avoid suits made for specific purposes except for when you actually intend to indulge in that activity. So, unless you're in frigid water or exploring the sea bottom, don't wear a wetsuit. Unless you are a surfer needing kneelength protection, do not wear surfer jams. Unless you are speed training or in a bodybuilding competition, do not wear a Speedo-style racing suit. Unless you're hell-bent on making the rest of the beach uncomfortable, do not wear a banana-hammock bikini-bottom suit.

—Jack Bettridge