

FASHION

The Legacy of Pauline Trigère, the Designer that Brought the Jumpsuit into Fashion

In between its humble history as a utilitarian uniform for the working class and becoming a staple of Halston's glamorous '70s style, the jumpsuit first gained popularity as a high fashion garment thanks to French-American designer Pauline Trigère.

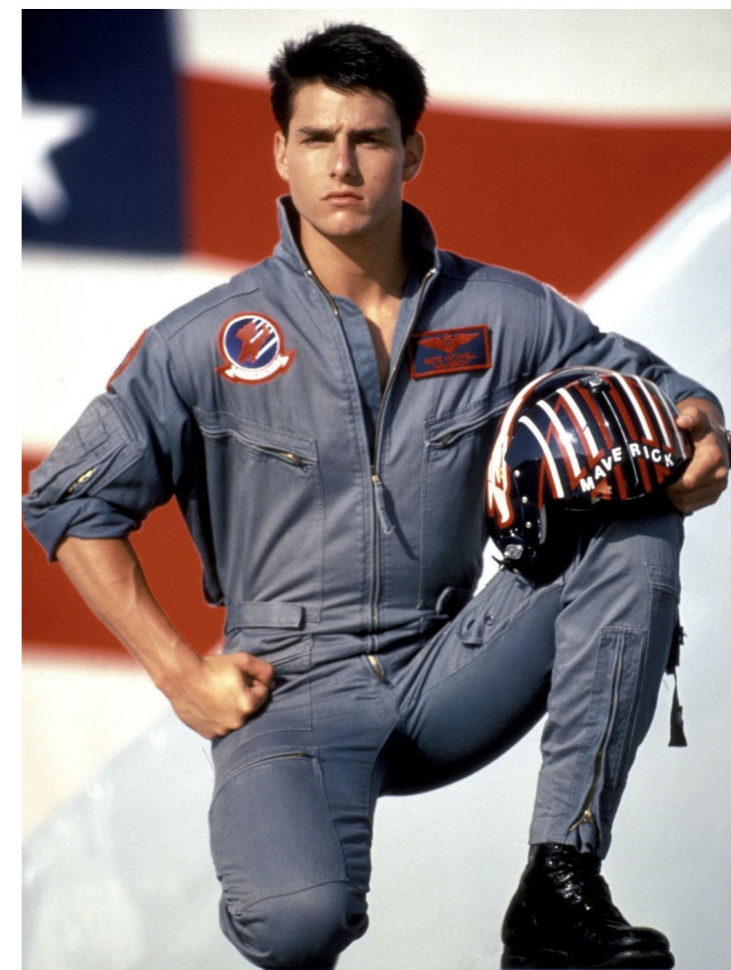
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by Alyssa Kelly



These days, it's easy to lack the motivation to pull together a whole outfit. Luckily, designers have blessed the fashion forward with the jumpsuit—a stylish middle ground that combines comfort and sophistication in one piece. First popularized as a trendy garment in the 1960s by French-American designer Pauline Trigère, whose birthday is today, the jumpsuit actually has roots as a utilitarian invention for occupational necessities that was reappropriated into the fashion landscape.

Trigère was known for her use of common textiles like cotton and wool for eveningwear, so she recognized the potential to elevate the practical workwear to a fashion favorite. A prolific tailor, Trigère used her precise cutting skills to bring jumpsuits into vogue. Before they were a wardrobe staple, however, the all-in-one silhouette was designed for military purposes during World War I. In 1917, Sidcot suits—a bulkier form of suit than pilots wear today—were developed by Sydney Cotton, a member of the British Royal Naval Air Service, for pilots flying at high altitudes with low temperatures. Over time, the suit has been updated to better equip airmen for arduous conditions, but pilots today still sport the basic conceptual design—as seen in the Tom Cruise film Top Gun—albeit with a slimmer cut.





Man works on motorcycle in boiler suit.

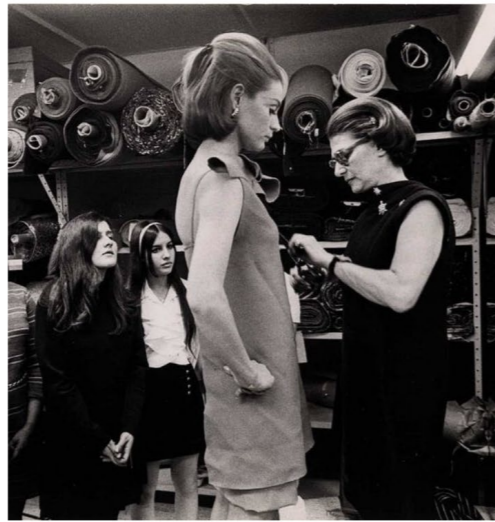
The style eventually became synonymous with workwear, as numerous industries adopted the boiler suit, another iteration of the jumpsuit, for mechanical work, coal mining, and other laborious jobs. The garment then found its way into women's closet when they took over traditionally male jobs during World War II (think Rosie the Riveter).

Simultaneously, in the 1930s, French designer Elsa Schiaparelli began designing jumpsuits for her bourgeoisie clientele. Although it generated buzz in high society, the design failed to break into the popular milieu. Over the next three decades, designers would begin toying with the concept, eventually bringing it to the forefront of fashion.



Jumpsuit by Elsa Schiaparelli, circa 1930s.

In the 1960s,
Pauline



Trigère's comfortable and stylish jumpsuits established them as a must-have wardrobe piece and brought the style into high fashion. The designer, who was born in Paris and later moved to New York, was known for her skilled tailoring and innovative silhouettes, and called Grace Kelly, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, and Elizabeth Taylor clients. For jumpsuits, her designs boasted bell bottoms and ballon sleeves, embracing the funky style of the late '60s. Vogue also gave its seal of approval to the staple garment by including a black jumpsuit created by Guy Laroche for the first time in their September 1964 issue.

With the entrance of the disco era in the late 1960s and '70s, the jumpsuit trend quickly spread from editorials to the Studio 54 crowd. Designers like Halston, Oscar de la Renta, and Yves Saint Laurent lended their own flair to the style, bringing international popularity to the one-piece clothing item.





Clockwise from top left-Jumpsuit by Pauline Trigère. Black Jumpsuit by Guy Laroche in September 1964 issue of "Vogue." Farrah Fawcett, Jaclyn Smith, and Kate Jackson in "Charlie's Angels." Cher in a bedazzled jumpsuit on "The Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour."

At its peak, celebrities including Cher and the ladies of *Charlie's Angels* rocked the jumpsuit or one of its iterations (like the romper or the catsuit). While the initial creation of the jumpsuit was for men, by the '70s, they were largely considered to be women's clothing in the common vernacular. However, the androgynous fashion of the glam rock era, perpetuated by singers like Elvis Presley and Elton John, led to the popularization of men's jumpsuits outside of laborer uniforms.





Elton John.

Somewhere in the 1980s, the jumpsuit zeitgeist ended as the design reached ubiquity before falling out of style. Jumpsuits rejoined the fashion scene in the early 2010s amidst an onslaught of nostalgic revivals. Brands like Gucci and Saint Laurent resurrected the silhouette, signalling that the jumpsuit was back. Even the boiler suit made a return in recent years as a grunge alternative to casualwear.



Gucci Spring/Summer 2011.

Despite changing trend forecasts, the utilitarian purposes of jumpsuits never faltered. Since its inception, the jumpsuit has remained associated with pilots, mechanics, and more. Thanks to its functionality and versatility, the style has been the uniform of choice for many industries, giving it a time-honored connotation as apparel of the working class. Whether the jumpsuit is in or out of style, such a timeless piece will never truly be out of commission.