



# Smooth Sailing

The maritime influence on fashion, and visa versa.

**The worlds of the sea** and of fashion have been inextricably linked for centuries. And contributions to the fashion world by the maritime industry are bountiful.

While nautical-inspired fashion promises to be particularly important for spring '03, various nautical-inspired clothing items regularly wander in and out of smart wardrobes depending on designer whim, practical need and the occasional illusion to exotic travel. With the exception of a gold hoop earring worn pirate-style, most lend a good deal of dash and panache. Come on: sailors have bravado, guts, and glory and are universally known to be downright sexy.

Ah. A bit of history is called for here. Legend has it the blaz-

er made its first appearance on the occasion of a visit by Queen Victoria to the H.M.S. Blazon. The captain, in an effort to impress, ordered the crew to dress in identical jackets with rank discerned by a few stars and bars. Clearly, Victoria liked the look and the blazer quickly morphed into a uniform which it remains the world over, on or off the water.

Bellbottoms, gob or bucket hats, gondolier stripes, bold Hawaiian prints, rope belts, pea coats, middie blouses, foul-weather gear and duffle bags have their origins aboard one or many types of seaworthy vessels. Each had a very practical reason to come into its own.

TopSiders, for example, were created to keep one from sliding

into the deep when faced with a slippery, wet topside (deck). Today they are as likely to be found wandering a mall as negotiating sheets and cleats. Traditionalists will tell you that true topsiders are made only of leather or canvas, the more beat up, the better.

Macramé is one of the few items with any fashion impact that was developed out of sheer boredom (or so it is said). Personally, I've never found time to get bored on board. If you're racing you've got too much to do; if you're cruising, something always needs fixing like drinks or an engine—unless, of course, you have a captain and crew to take care of such needs.

So if the world of sailing has contributed a good deal to the

wardrobes of many, what has the fashion community given back to the world of yachting?

A lot if you are heading up the sponsorship of a major regatta, campaign, or event. A prime example is the collaboration of Louis Vuitton with the America's Cup, possibly the most sought after trophy in the world.

Between 1851 and the late 1960s, any one with money and time could lay claim to participating in the fabled America's Cup Challenge. In 1970, with more and more countries vying for the precious prize, the New York Yacht Club, which had a lock on the cup, allowed for a series of match races among clubs and syndicates to establish a single competitor for the prize.

Things got pretty chaotic until trouble, in name of Bruno Trouble, the Frenchman and world-class skipper, came to the fore. In 1983, he approached the famed trunk maker and the Louis Vuitton Cup was born. This was a well run elimination series which established who would challenge the NYYC. Just to set the record straight, it was the first year America lost the America's Cup to Australia. The slogan was born and remains, "To win the America's Cup, you must first win the Louis Vuitton Cup!"

Louis Vuitton merged with Moët Hennessey and began gobbling up a number of prestigious fashion houses. Ironically, the last winner of the Vuitton Cup was Prada, the Italian challenge team owned and headed up by Patrizio Bertelli.

The team didn't win but it sure made a fashion statement (In America's Cup racing, statements of this kind can easily pass the \$60-\$70 million or so level.) With its sleek red-striped, gray hull and chic team uniforms, Prada was a force to be reckoned with and may or may not be again when the boats take to the waters this spring in Auckland.

Vuitton does not stand alone in sponsoring challenges. This past year, Nautica underwrote the Star Class World Championships. The company is also the official apparel sponsor of Team Dennis Connor's Stars and Stripes challenge for the America's Cup, for which Omega is the official timekeeper.

Rolex underwrites numerous races and regattas, including the Fastnet, called the Everest of racing with some 608 nautical miles to cover, and the IMS Offshore World Cup. Rolex was the timekeeper of record for the monumental Transatlantic Challenge held this past May, in which boats new, old and historic took part. One of those was a 1938 12-meter Nyala which is owned and has been perfectly restored by Patrizio Bertelli. (Yes, the crew wore Prada.)

And, those bold logo sails seen crossing the starting line under the watchful eyes of the Statue of Liberty were Tommy Hilfiger's Freedom America, one of the Around Alone Race fleet which left New York in September.

And then there is Leonardo Ferragamo, based in Florence, Italy. Leonardo has loved to sail since childhood. When he saw his first Nauticos Swan boat it was the beginning of a love affair. This author had the same response. But Leonardo has two things I don't. First, he had the cash to purchase a Swan, which is no small matter; then he had the good sense to buy the company when the opportunity arose. He is now its chairman. Someday I hope he invites me along for a sail.

To see a Swan of any size glide through the water is to witness beauty and grace in motion. These German Frers design boats are built in Finland and are the finest cruising-racing yachts on the water. The interiors are all class and character, as one would expect from anything that is Ferragamo; the exterior is pure performance. The latest

model is a 45-footer, built tough to compete. Personally, my heart is set on a 60. Dream big, if you're dreaming.

Ralph Lauren is certainly a man who dreams big. But that doesn't mean he like his boats



big. His company may be named for another sport but when he launched his fragrance Polo Ralph Lauren Blue the image he chose was a Fisher's Island 31. That Herreschoff designed boat was from 1927 and is all teak and tidy with billowing white cotton sails.

No word on if the boat belongs to Ralph but the designer does sail. And not infrequently, he incorporates maritime themes in his collections.

In a class by itself, the Zegna family has also made major contributions to the world of sailing, and the world at large. Most recently, they used their celebrity-studded Portofino regatta sponsorship to announce their newest environmental effort: sponsoring a research vessel to assess the declining health of the Mediterranean. Whoever said fashion is frivolous surely does not know the Zegna family whose commitment to quality clothing is surpassed only by their commitment to making the world better, one ocean at a time.

Want to check out boats and keep up with the races?

Consider visiting the important boat shows in Annapolis, Fort Lauderdale, Miami and Monaco.

For the races try sites such as [www.americascup.com](http://www.americascup.com), [www.lcup.com](http://www.lcup.com), [www.nauticgroup.com](http://www.nauticgroup.com), [www.aroundalone.com](http://www.aroundalone.com)