

# Flashback: 20th Century Fashion Influences

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Hello again! The May theme for the Fashion Manuscript is "Body Positivity" and how the fashion industry has adapted to love all body types and elevate body positivity for all ages, genders and style categories. I am certain this is a subject that I am no expert on, but I am a professional advisor on the changes in the apparel industry over the last 50 years, and that is the subject of this article.

Last month, I spoke about the two men I consider to be the fathers of the apparel industry in Los Angeles: Sam Simon and Bud Schoenholz, who assisted New York apparel designers and entrepreneurs move to Los Angeles and open their businesses. The West Coast provided a lifestyle that was casual and relaxed. Apparel companies such as Ocean Pacific, Arpeja, Teddi of California, Loubella, Le Baron Clothing and Louis Roth were just a few of the manufacturers I was familiar with in the early 1970s. Manufacturing was all done in Los Angeles. Yes, it is true that sewing shops flourished in the streets of L.A. There were several hundred thousand people employed in the apparel industry during the 1970s, and today Los Angeles employs only 45 thousand in the industry.

In the 1970s, Loubella was the first company that looked to produce their gabardine pants offshore. They went to South Korea and began importing by the mid-1970s. The cost was substantially lower than producing in Los Angeles, and their business grew tremendously as the cost savings allowed them to lower their selling price. My grandmother and aunts were big customers of Loubella; it was all they would wear. I learned something from Loubella that I will always remember.

Companies must adapt and change with the times. Loubella made their reputation on those pants, and as my grandmother and aunts passed away, so did Loubella because they never changed the product for the next

generation. Every company must be aware of the market they are serving, and as the market changes, the business's survival depends on changing, too. Too many companies cling to the norm and block progress.

Los Angeles had many textile plants manufacturing fabric to sell to clothing manufacturers in cities across the U.S. This was a big business for the Los Angeles market, and in 1972 a start-up company came to Los Angeles with the concept of bringing in fabrics from Japan. This company, Merry Mary Fabrics, brought new life to the garment industry with its bright colors and beautiful designs. At the time, I had never seen anything like this in my few years in the industry. Most of the textile companies I was familiar with produced basic colors such as white, black and gray. Nothing compared to the Merry Mary Fabric designs and colors. The company grew rapidly and profitably with good gross profits.

The 1970s saw tremendous growth in the apparel industry in Los Angeles. With the bright colors and beautiful designs coming from Japan, we saw the growth of the swimsuit industry. Not only was Ocean Pacific leading the way with their OP Shorts, but swimwear companies such as Apparel Ventures also came into existence, with many different brands that just took off. Consumers wanted fresh new colorful clothing, and these companies saw the opportunity and filled the need. The late 1970s was the beginning of a change in the apparel industry. The Iranian

Revolution of 1979 saw a wave of Iranian immigrants fleeing to the U.S., and many of these immigrants had a textile background. Some became textile converters, and others set up textile mills to produce fabrics to be sold to apparel manufacturers. They were able to operate with low overheads and very competitive prices. The importers from Japan were not able to compete with these price points and, slowly but surely, the overseas importers were out of business.

The 1970s also provided us with our first gasoline lines. Do you remember when you could only buy gas on even or odd days, based on your license plate number? The shortage of gas also was the beginning of the increase in fuel costs. By 1980, gas was over \$1 per gallon for the first time, up from \$0.36 per gallon ten years earlier. Inflation in the 1970s was so high that interest costs hit 20% for bank borrowing. I mention the cost of fuel because everything we buy is impacted by the cost of fuel. The supply side requires fuel to get raw materials to the factories, and then from the factories to the retail stores. As the cost goes up, it is added to the product and ultimately passed on to the consumer. Sounds familiar. The same thing is happening in 2022 and 2023 as we pay more for all our consumer products.

In future articles, I will progress from the 1980s to the present, but in the meantime remember what I always conclude with--- if you are not having fun, then do something else!