

Fig. 1. Oscar de la Renta jumpsuit. Author's photo. FRC2014.07.059.

OSCAR DE LA RENTA: THE HISTORY BEHIND THE BOUTIQUE LABEL



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Beginning in the 1960s, Oscar de la Renta created a name for himself in the fashion industry by turning his artistic sketches into extravagant garments. This vibrant jumpsuit (see Fig.1), from the Toronto Metropolitan University Fashion Research Collection, takes us back to the beginning of Oscar de la Renta's design career and tells us about fashion innovation during such a monumental time.

The garment is a 1970s jumpsuit, with a polka dot and flower pattern printed onto it. It has a detailed neckline, cinches at the waist and the pants flow out so as to mimic the look of a dress. The jumpsuit is a feminine piece made to accentuate the figure, and closes at the back with a zipper. Each aspect and element to this garment is extremely artistic and eye catching, however the most noticeable detail of this garment, when observing the interior, is the Oscar de la Renta label. The label reads Oscar de la Renta Boutique (see Fig. 2).

The word boutique on this label is a word that holds a great amount of value regarding the culture and history during this period. Considering that the word boutique is not on a modern day Oscar de la Renta garment (see Fig.3), I am asking the question as to why, during this time, was the word boutique added to the label? As well, with further exploration I look to discover the reasoning for removing this word.



Fig. 2. Oscar de la Renta 1970's Boutique label. Authors photo. FRC2014.07.059.

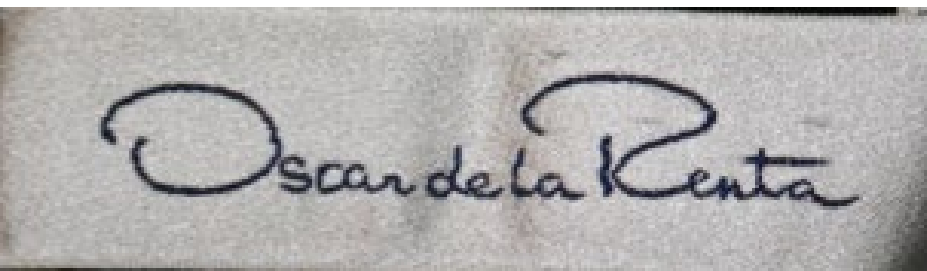


Fig. 3. Modern day Oscar de la Renta label retrieved. Admin. "De La Renta, Oscar." *Vintage Fashion Guild*, 11 July 2010, <https://vintagefashionguild.org/label-resource/de-la-renta-oscar/>

THE MEANING BEHIND THE WORD BOUTIQUE

There are two different ways to define the word boutique. The first one defines the physical retail space itself. "The word 'boutique' is a corruption of the Greek apotheke meaning 'something put aside' or storehouse, which then became apotheca, the Latin word for shop" (Fogg, 2). During the 1960s, boutiques were changing the way in which individuals shopped, as they were beginning to replace the larger department stores. The boutique was a new development as it created a laid back environment when shopping, as opposed to the proper behaviour associated with shopping at a department store. "In the early 1960's against a backdrop of social upheaval - a reaction to the staid department stores and exclusive couture that was available. For the first time, the boutique offered high fashion to the young, the attractive and the 'cool'" (Fogg, Inside cover text). The boutique in this instance is a type of store, however the meaning of the word boutique on the Oscar de la Renta garment is defined as a ready-to-wear piece.

HISTORY BEHIND BOUTIQUE COLLECTIONS

Boutique, on the Oscar de la Renta label, was the 1960's way of stating that a garment was part of the 'ready-to-wear' collection. Department stores and boutique shops differed in atmosphere and attitude, which similarly translated into the differences between the haute couture and ready-to-wear collections (Fogg, 2). As designers began to determine that customers were getting younger, becoming more casual with their dress and seeking realistic prices, the Boutique collections began to come into effect. "It holds styles to take a lady through day to night. Prices range from \$35 to \$200. Heavy emphasis is on shifts and pant dresses...also lots of vinyl" (Jet-setter shop bows at pogue's, sales, buyer fly, 1). An average Oscar de la Renta boutique piece during this time costed approximately \$125 , translating to around \$830 today. Oscar de la Renta's 1965 boutique collection was one of the pioneers in this category, paving the way for many other designers who followed (Jacobs, 8). "Oscar de la Renta introduces his boutique collection for fall. As he says, 'they are fun clothes that you don't take too seriously... a lot of color and a lot of print for under \$125'" (see Fig. 4) (Eye, 2).

Oscar de la Renta's description of his boutique collection accurately identifies the jumpsuit featured in the Fashion Research Collection. Originating as a suit for jumping, often used by parachuters in the military, the jumpsuit quickly became stylized and began to make its way down the catwalk in the 1960s. The garment from the FRC possesses aspects of the bold colours and prints, which Oscar describes, along with a more fun and laid back look, as the garment is a jumpsuit as opposed to a dress. As well, the newspaper article further describes the waists of many of the garments to be "marked at the waistline set-in or wrapped up belts" (Eye, 2). While observing the jumpsuit, it is noticeable that there is a belt missing as there are belt loops sewn into the garment around the waist. It is interesting that this was a common feature associated with multiple boutique pieces at this time. Further, with the vast number of dresses that Oscar de la Renta designed for his haute couture label, it is fascinating to see the relation and thought that went into the jumpsuit which was part of the boutique collections, while dresses continued to be haute couture. "His fashion message was clearly pants for day and night" (Fashion rtw: Oscar's boutique, 1969). The boutique collections were often worn by younger individuals, who were more price sensitive, allowing designer brands to reach a wider customer base (see Fig.5).



Fig. 4. Example of the fun and colourful clothing that was part of the boutique collections. "Eye." *Women's Wear Daily*, vol. 114, no. 117, Jun 16, 1967, pp. 2. ProQuest, <http://ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/docview/1523471769?accountid=13631>.



Fig. 5. Oscar de la Renta runway show displaying jumpsuits with bold prints. "Fashion Rtw: Oscar's Boutique." *Women's Wear Daily*, vol. 118, no. 27, Feb 07, 1969, pp. 28. ProQuest, <http://ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/docview/1523578884?accountid=13631>.



Fig. 6. YSL haute couture and ready-to-wear similarities. "" Yves Saint Laurent's Rive Gauche Revolution." *Yves Saint Laurent Halston Fashioning the 70s Blog*, 3 Mar. 2015, <https://exhibitions.fitnyc.edu/blog-ysl-halston/yves-saint-laurents-rive-gauche-revolution/>.

SAINT LAURENT RIVE GAUCHE

Through the success that Oscar de la Renta had with the development of his boutique collections, it is no surprise that many other designers adopted this idea. "On September 19, 1966, Yves Saint Laurent opened a ready-to-wear boutique in Paris called 'Saint Laurent Rive Gauche'" (The Museum at FIT, 2015). When this line was launched, it was located in a widely student populated location in order to reach a younger demographic. It was a huge success as it incorporated many aspects of the YSL haute couture garments (The Museum at FIT, 2015). Along with their success, boutique labels offered another outlet for designers to create more elaborate pieces without the pressures that were associated with the haute couture line. As Yves Saint Laurent began to design multiple styles that overlapped with his haute couture brand (see Fig. 6) he announced in a television interview that he has "'chosen to present [his] fashion through [his] ready-to-wear rather than through [his] haute couture'. With Rive Gauche, Saint Laurent was able to formulate a distinct style and approach to dressing that formed the core of his brand and became synonymous with the modernity of the 1970s" (The Museum at FIT, 2015). Both Oscar de la Renta and Yves Saint Laurent were successful in creating ready-to-wear lines during the 1960s-1970s, ultimately altering the way in which individuals shopped for designer clothing.

CONCLUSION

The idea of making designer clothing more accessible to individuals who are price sensitive, is one that has continued to develop throughout the years. Today, there are many brands that create diffusion lines in order to reach larger demographics, which increases brand awareness. The connection that the Oscar de la Renta garment, chosen from the Fashion Research Collection, has to the way that individuals continue to shop today is very thought provoking. In just one garment, there is a vast amount of history, culture and progression that was achieved in the fashion industry during this period. In conclusion, the word "boutique", associated with the Oscar de la Renta label, represented much more than just a ready-to-wear jumpsuit. This word gave us a better understanding of the materials, colours and patterns, the price point and the young individual who would have worn this day to night transitional piece during the 1970s.

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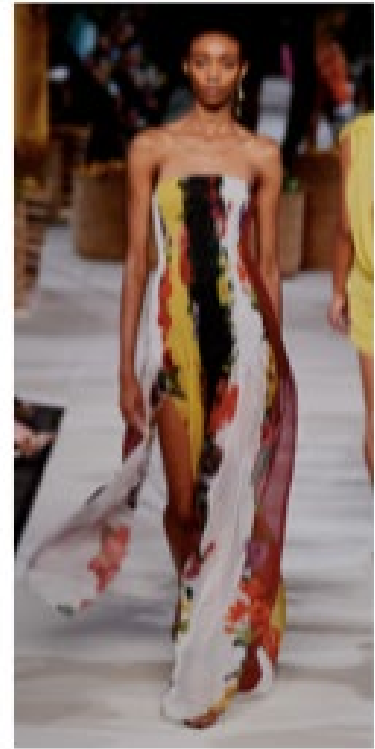
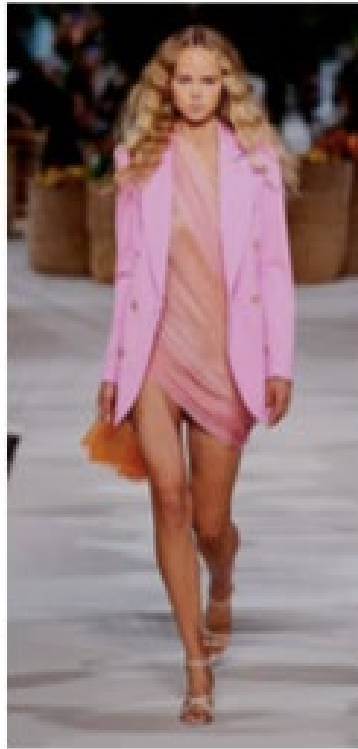
Across Canada



Past to Present

In another edition of past to present, featured in FS8002 magazine, we will be analysing the popular evening wear brand, Oscar de la Renta. In the 1970s, Oscar de la Renta's ready-to-wear collection was priced between \$50-\$200 and was designed to fit the needs of a younger, more price sensitive, clientele. Through the comparison of the 1970s jumpsuit, found in Ryerson's Fashion Research Collection, and images from the Oscar de la Renta Spring/Summer 2020 ready-to-wear runway show, I will be drawing on a few unique aspects and differences that have changed throughout the past 50 years. Though the collection continues to portray a youthful aesthetic, with a mix of bold patterns, colours and wearable styles, there are many aspects of the collection, and the company as a whole, which have shifted overtime.

Lauren Kim and Fernando Garcia are the current designers of Oscar de la Renta, already showing that there was an obvious change in design since the 1970s. Through the current runway styles, we see a mix of both short and long dresses, with a few pants and jackets to accompany them. This differs from Oscar de la Renta's 1970s boutique collection, as the majority of the collection was jumpsuits, considering that his haute couture line was primarily made up of dresses and gowns. In the current runways show, we see haute couture meeting ready-to-wear in both the design and the price point. According to Oscar de la Renta's e-commerce site, ready-to-wear pieces average \$1,500 - \$7,500. As well, the spring/summer 2020 collection is described to be an "excellent collection that's ready to be packed for their clientele's next luxurious getaway" (Mccall, 2019).



This description of a luxurious getaway, further shows the differentiation between the clientele that the brand targeted in the past, versus the clientele targeted today. The shift in the Oscar de la Renta ready-to-wear collection from the 1970s to today has changed significantly. Yet, like most fashion brands, it is not done evolving and changing and will continue to do so throughout the years ahead. Although I do not believe that Oscar de la Renta would recreate its ready-to-wear line to be more accessible to a price sensitive consumer, like it previously had done in the past, I do believe that it will continue to take creative inspiration from the jumpsuits, belts and bold patterns that once walked down the Oscar de la Renta runway.

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