

STYLE & FASHION

Keeping Up With the Jeans

Each season denim cuts morph anew. Here's how to stay above the fray with a more timeless look

BY JESSICA IREDALE

AT CURRENT count, there are 18 pairs of jeans in my closet, not including what ever lurks in the storage bins under my bed. Of that bloated group, only three are in regular rotation. The rest—too skinny, too stretch, too cropped and gently flared, too “mom jeans”—have been rendered dated by the new and cool, and shelved or downgraded to something that I will only wear to the airport.

When the denim gods speak, it's usually in a whisper that

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moves the needle forward ever so slightly. Marginally tweaked leg cuts go in and out, rises move up and down by mere centimeters. The wash of the moment is no longer, say, classic indigo but its fraternal twin: vintage indigo. An accumulation of those incremental changes results in jeans that can look jarringly wrong within a few years. Those step-hem jeans you had to have in 2016—whose hems look like they were given a mullet cut with a pair of kitchen

shears—belong in a time capsule. Staying on-trend can be an exhausting, not to mention expensive, exercise in denim acrobatics. And yet I compulsively partake, along with countless other women. A total of 364 million pairs of women's jeans were sold in the U.S. over the 12-month period ending in February 2019 (a 16.4% increase from the previous year), according to the NPD Group, a market research group.

Today, I feel the gravitational pull of a straight leg with a mid-high waist, classic blue wash and no stretch. My instinct has been validated by a number of jean professionals, including Marianne McDonald, creative director of Citizens of Humanity, the L.A.-based denim brand. “We’ve had nearly a decade of slim and skinny shapes. Now people are embracing silhouettes that are looser from the body,” she said. “The shifts happen so slightly until it builds up into a landslide and you’re like, ‘Oh, I want something entirely different.’”

What’s coming down the runways and the culture at large dictates such change. We’re in a moment where authenticity and comfort hold valuable social currency. “That takes form in the shape of flatter shoes and styles that have a little bit more ease,” said Ms. McDonald, noting that one of Citizen’s leading styles, the Charlotte, has a ‘90s-inspired cut that sits high on the waist, with a straight leg and 100% non-stretch



STRAIGHT DOWN THE LINE
An example of good, classic denim on the street in London.

cotton. Pure cotton doesn’t have the ease of stretch, but it ages beautifully, softening to your shape.

“There’s a nostalgic love of the ‘90s happening in fashion right now,” confirmed Jill Guenza, VP of global women’s design at Levi Strauss & Co. “That era was all about straight-leg Levi’s 501s worn high on the waist and snug through the hips.” Levi’s original 501s, designed in 1873, remain remarkably relevant—and flattering. At \$98, they are a cynicism-free investment piece. While they reached a peak in Princess Diana’s

style-icon heyday, they look just as trim and unimpeachable now. If classic 501s are the baseline for the latest “it” jeans, that’s good news for those who are tired of chasing objectively weird-looking trends like cropped mini-flares.

The new trend is timelessness, and the ‘90s nostalgia guiding things is more classic than grunge. Branding is subtle: See the low-key black enamel and brass button at the waist of Khaite’s best-selling high-rise Danielle jean, pictured at left. Those jeans are an example of the trend on the MatchesFashion e-commerce site, according to its head of womenswear Cassie Smart. “It just feels like a new silhouette that’s going to work hard in your wardrobe and not date.” Granted, an unpredictable return to low-rise Paris Hilton-style flares could throw us all for a loop soon, but this straight style does appear to

have staying power.

New York-based denim label B Sides does washes in shades including indigo with a vintage patina. The cuts are based on classic men’s tailored jeans, such as the Arts Jean with a mid-high waist and straight leg. “It’s the movement away from the skinny jean,” said co-founder Stacy Daily. She wanted to offer something “ageless and demographic-less.” Simple and untrendy, these pieces recall the original Levi’s made for men and worn by everyone.

Even seasoned pros get denim burnout. It led photographer and stylist Stevie Dance to launch the brand the Feel Studio last year under the premise that a single jean can satisfy all of your denim needs and withstand trends. “I didn’t have time to sort through a sea of jeans for the rest of my life,” she said. The Genuine Jean is what Ms. Dance considers a universally flattering silhouette: a straight-leg jean in 100% cotton. Lest the concept sound a little too “Sisterhood of the Traveling

Pants,” the Feel site offers thorough tips that let you choose a size according to fit preference. After taking the fit quiz and corresponding with Ms. Dance, who often answers customers’ emails and DMs personally, I ordered three pairs in the same cut ranging from a size 25 to a 28. One was snug, one was straight, one was oversize. Miraculously, they all fit, in different ways.

A Fragrant Handbag?

Spraying perfume on skin is so 2018. Here are novel ways of wearing your scent as an accessory



THE BROOCH

Hidden on the back of this avian pin is a compartment that holds ceramic discs pre-treated with Diptyque scents like Eau Rose. This bauble is part of the storied French fragrance brand’s new Prêt-à-Parfumer collection—which also includes fanciful goodies such as scented bracelets. Brooch (with two discs), \$120, diptyqueparis.com



THE BAG

The Fendi Baguette, a handbag that’s been decorated with both furry creatures and couture-level embroidery, will launch in its newest form for Art Basel Miami. Created with French perfumer Francis Kurkdjian, the bag comes with a built-in powdery scent engineered to last for years. Bag, \$3190, Fendi, 786-655-5400



THE NECKLACE

In the 18th and 19th centuries, those concerned with bodily odors carried vinaigrettes, screened boxes filled with a vinegar-soaked sponge. Playing with this concept, designer Maria Aaron makes modern-day cube pendants ready to be filled with a cotton ball soaked in your favorite fragrance. Box, \$12,000, Lock, \$17,000, Maria Aaron, 917-991-9246

—Rebecca Malinsky

BLUE PERIOD / SIMPLE OPTIONS THAT WON'T DATE ANY TIME SOON



The Danielle Jean,
\$340,
khaite.com

The Genuine Jean,
\$295,
thefeelstudioinc.com

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