

# RIVIERA STYLE

## Resort & Swimwear since 1900

22 May – 29 August 2015



- Fashion and Textile Museum announces new exhibition (opens 22 May) exploring over 100 years of fashionable bathing from the English seaside to the Côte d'Azur and California.
- Exhibition highlights include Edwardian bathing dresses, knitted swimsuits, barely there Lycra, and a 21st century burkini.
- Sections include: Bathing Beauties 1900–20; Cling, Bag, Stretch 1920–40; Mould and Control 1940–60; The Body Beautiful 1960–90; and, Second Skin 1990–present day.
- Highlights the contribution of the UK's design education training and technology to today's global fashion swimwear industry.
- Riviera Style is curated by Dr Christine Boydell, De Montfort University and features the collections of Leicestershire County Council.

From the English Riviera to the Côte d'Azur, 'Riviera Style' celebrates fashion at its most fun. With swimsuits and sarongs, brightly patterned cover-ups, boat neck Bretons and beach pyjamas, playsuits, bikinis and burkinis, the exhibition brings together over 100 years of clothing worn in and by the sea. See how clothing design, fabric and attitudes to modesty have changed over many years, in combination with a social history of holidays.

Exhibition research by guest curator and design historian Dr Christine Boydell sheds new light on the relationship with swimwear, beachwear and the body. 'A key feature of the items selected is the importance of material', says Dr Boydell, 'from early examples to produce the perfect fabric that didn't bag or sag when wet, to more recent technical developments designed to improve fit and increase speed in the water.'

Dr Boydell, whose scholarly research on Horrockses Fashions led to a national resurgence of interest in the brand, identifies the changes in swim- and beachwear as a reflection of the changing mores of society. 'Days at the beach began as a health cure when sea air was prescribed by doctors in the Victorian era. Before the 1920s swimming costumes were for bathing; the trend for sunbathing which emerged led to a radical change in the design of swimsuits and beach attire. By the 1930s men's and women's suits had cut away sections and later two-piece models became popular, though many 1940s and 50s swimsuits still had modesty skirts. In the 1940s, swimwear became more like corsetry and a lot of companies, particularly Symington, used the idea of "corset-cut" as a selling point', states Dr Boydell.

The exhibition delves into the extensive archives at Leicestershire County Council, private collections, fashion magazines and trade journals for original source material. From Edwardian bathing dresses, which preserved the wearer's modesty, and knitted swimsuits to barely there Lycra, it's all here – including the burkini which drew national attention when worn by Nigella Lawson on holiday. There are glamorous swimming costumes worn by beauty queens at the seaside resorts of Britain – and there's even one off-the-peg Symington's design which was worn by the winner of Miss Great Britain in 1965. (In a sign of the times, she was presented with her prize by comedians Morecambe and Wise).

Head of the Fashion and Textile Museum, Celia Joicey said: 'Thanks to Leicestershire County Council, the UK is guardian to one of the world's most significant collections of swimwear. We are delighted to be showing these rare examples in London for the first time, and to make them accessible to as many people as possible. In collaboration with Newham College and De Montfort University, we hope the exhibition will illuminate past and present swimwear fashions, and inspire future design directions in the industry'.

The exhibition is organized in five themes:

#### **1900–20 Bathing Beauties**

Bathing became a recreational pastime in the mid-nineteenth century and specialised dress was all about preserving the wearers' modesty. Resort wear was quite formal and the only difference from ordinary fashion was the use of lighter fabrics often in paler colours. Early swimwear was knitted; men wore one-piece garments designed to cover their chests, while women's bathing dresses were, in the earlier days, made of serge, cotton or jersey fabric and stockings and hats were essential accessories.

#### **1920–40 Cling, Bag, Stretch**

This section looks at the different fabrics which have been used over the years. One of the great challenges to designers of swimwear has been the maintenance of good fit when the suit was dry and wet. The introduction of elastic-based yarns in the 1930s was a real innovation. The period saw top designers including resort wear in their collections.

#### **1940–60 Mould and Control**

Mould and control charts how designs moved to more sculpted models, based on corsetry designs. Manufacturers exploited the growing trend for an annual summer holiday creating daywear and beach ensembles in bright colourful prints. Swimwear was essentially a form of underwear worn in public and many of the techniques used in underwear manufacturer were used for swimming costumes, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s





#### **1960–90 The Body Beautiful**

The period from 1960 to the end of the 1980s was characterised by the shrinking swimsuit. As the amount of fabric decreased and internal support was reduced it became more important for the wearer to improve their physique through exercise and diet.

#### **1990 onwards Second Skin**

The end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty first have seen the introduction of sophisticated fabric technology which has found its way to the beach via competitive swimming at the highest level.

## Notes to editors

1. The exhibition is organised by the Fashion and Textile Museum and Newham College. It is curated by Dr Christine Boydell, Principal Lecturer in Design History at De Montfort University with support from Sarah Nicol, at Leicestershire County Council Museum Service and Dennis Nothdruff at the Fashion and Textile Museum. Exhibition in partnership with Leicestershire County Council and Newham College. The exhibition also features a selection of prints and vintage posters celebrating fashion and travel over the last 100 years, curated by King & McGaw.
2. Exhibition dates 22<sup>nd</sup> May – 29<sup>th</sup> August 2015.
3. The Fashion and Textile Museum is at 83 Bermondsey Street, London SE1 3XF. [www.ftmlondon.org](http://www.ftmlondon.org)
4. Exhibition opening times: Tuesday–Sunday, 11am–6pm; Thursday until 8pm; Sunday until 5pm last admission 45 minutes prior to closing. Closed Mondays.
5. Ticket prices: £8.80 adults, £6.60 concessions, £5.50 students, inclusive of 10% donation. Under 12s are free. Booking information online [www.ftmlondon.org](http://www.ftmlondon.org)
6. **Fashion and Textile Museum** is the only museum in the UK solely dedicated to showcasing developments in contemporary fashion, as well as providing inspiration, support and training for those working in the industry. Founded by iconic British designer Zandra Rhodes, the museum is owned by Newham College London – one of Europe’s largest further education colleges. The Museum is located in the only building in Europe designed by award-winning Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta (1931–2011).
7. **Leicestershire County Council Museum Service** is responsible for the care and stewardship of over one million objects which are cared for by specialist curators. The Service makes its collections available through displays at its museum sites, loans to exhibitions (such as ‘Riviera Style’) and through a programme of study and inspirational visits to its Collections Resources Centre. For details click [www.leics.gov.uk/museumcollections](http://www.leics.gov.uk/museumcollections)
8. **Dr Christine Boydell** is a design historian who specialises in the history of fashion and textiles. Her PhD was on the American textile designer Marion Dorn. She is the author of *Horrockses Fashions: Off the Peg Style in the 40s and 50s* and curated an exhibition of the same title at the Fashion and Textile Museum. She has curated exhibitions for Leicestershire County Council and is currently Subject Leader for Critical & Contextual Studies at De Montfort University, Leicester.
9. **King & McGaw** is the official image partner for the exhibition. A leading publishing, printing and framing company, King & McGaw works with top museums across Europe and North America to produce high quality retail products. A pioneer of print-on-demand technology, King & McGaw’s consumer website (currently t/a Easyart) brings museum-quality prints to the wider public. In partnership with leading institutions and iconic brands such as Vogue, P&O Heritage and the National Railway Museum, as well as contemporary artists, King & McGaw will offer exhibition visitors an inspiring and curated collection of prints that will be available to buy at the Museum shop and online. [www.easyart.com](http://www.easyart.com) @easyartuk
10. Social media  
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## For exhibition press information and images please contact:

Alison Lowe, Press Officer, Felicities Ltd,  
representing Fashion and Textile Museum,  
Tel: + 44 (0)20 7377 6030, Email: [Alison@felicities.co.uk](mailto:Alison@felicities.co.uk)



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## Exhibition images



l to r: La Plage de Calvi, Corse, 1928 (Colour Litho) by Roger Broders (1883-1953). Private collection. Photo © Christie's Images / Bridgeman Images. Women's navy wool all-in-one suit with green trim, 1920s. Men's knitted all-in-one with over briefs with decorative appliquéd white dog and white braid trimming, early 20th century.



l to r: Women's leopard print swimsuit in rayon with a multi-lactron elastic yarn, 1939. Men's striped cut-away 'speed suit' with underarm cut-away section, 1930s. Women's tan and blue scalloped edge swimsuit, 1953. Made under the brand name 'Peter Pan' and manufactured by R and W.H Symington Co. Ltd. Women's pink and white swimsuit 'Florida'. 1971. Made in stretch nylon jersey under the brand name, 'Caprice' and manufactured by R and W.H Symington Co. Ltd. All garments Leicestershire County Council Collection. Images courtesy Leicestershire County Council Museum Service.



l to r: Swimsuit Avro Gal 73, September 1965. Manufactured by R and W.H Symington Co. Ltd. Women's Team GB swimsuit, 2012. Designed by Stella McCartney and made by Adidas for the 2012 London Olympic Games; Men's LZR Racer suit, 2008. Part of the Speedo Fastskin racing system made of Teflon coated Lycra. All garments Leicestershire County Council Collection. Images courtesy Leicestershire County Council Museum Service.