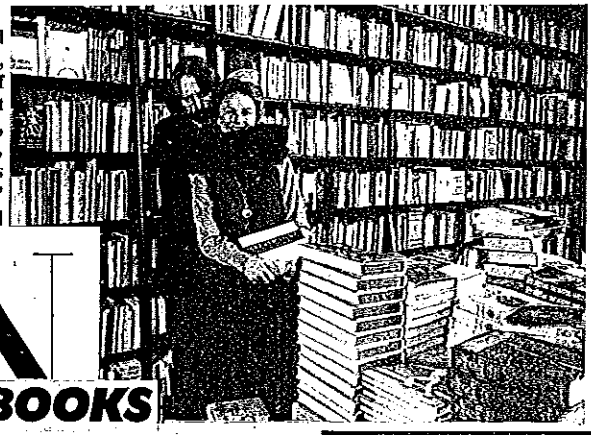

Burt Britton and Jeannette Watson, co-owners of Manhattan's newest literary legend, Books & Co., at their famous book-lined "Wall"

IN BOOKS

The growing passion—not window dressings, but real literature sold by small, bold, independent shops. What special needs do they satisfy?

By Eliot Fremont-Smith

No hope, as good as dead. That was the expert prognosis a few years back for the small, independent, literary bookshop. Remainder stores and expanded, newly aggressive book sections in department stores (some offering bargain prices on currently popular books) were already killing it. Now the bookstore chains would finish the job.

The great bookstore chains, led by B. Dalton Bookseller and Waldenbook Company, Inc., were revolutionizing the industry. They were moving in and taking over. Efficient, computerized warehousing; rapid, high-volume turnover; customer-enticing discounts; emphasis on multimedia-promoted best sellers—this was the inexorable wave of the future. And, for reasons a child could understand, there would be simply no place in that future for the independent bookshop. It was all quite sad, but economic "rationalization" of the book industry has been long overdue. There are no gains without pains, said the experts—facts are facts, R.I.P.

And so the book chains moved in. That the future had at last arrived was symbolized by, more than anything else, the opening last fall of B. Dalton's huge Manhattan "flagship" store at 666 Fifth Avenue. But a funny thing happened along the way: The small, independent, literary bookshop declined to die. In fact, new such bookshops have been opening up. The most famous of these—Books & Co., on Madison Avenue between Seventy-fourth and Seventy-fifth Streets (a few doors down from the Whitney Museum)—opened only a few months before the Dalton shop and, by every appearance, has been flourishing ever since.

This success implies needs—needs that cannot be met by bigness and efficiency alone. In fact, bigness may itself provoke certain needs—for the personal and intimate. Especially with books, reading being a one-on-one experience. It's a matter of scale: you get everything big and the same, and people start hankering for small and different.

Does this mean that the experts have been wrong? Not entirely. It depends on definitions. There are perhaps six hundred small, independent bookshops around the country (no

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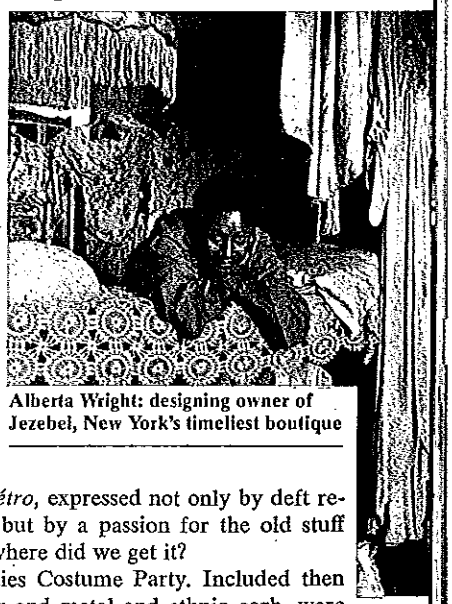
Jade Albert

IN VINTAGE CLOTHES

The modern impulse is to redefine our sartorial past. Does the new art of dress signal a new self-image?

By Anne Hollander



Alberta Wright: designing owner of Jezebel, New York's timeliest boutique

The Old Clothes Mode is entirely twentieth century. One hundred years ago nobody with any flair for style—Daisy Miller or Anna Karenina, say—could possibly feel elegant in an 1839 pelisse, whatever its state of preservation or original chic.

For clothes, going out of date used to be an irreversible process. The clothes Mother wore became increasingly ridiculous until, eventually, they might achieve a nice condition called "quaintness." You could look fine if you were quaintly dressed—but only if you were on the stage, or at a costume party, or if you were a comic, elderly, or rural personage, or a child. But "quaintness" is now obsolete. Instead, we have *la mode rétro*, expressed not only by deft reproductions of lately outmoded fashions but by a passion for the old stuff itself. Why do we have this passion, and where did we get it?

Some of it came from the Great 'Sixties Costume Party. Included then among possible getups, along with leather and metal and ethnic garb, were clothes that looked as if they had been long imprisoned in the attic, or maybe in the grave. Shops flourished by purveying all sorts of musty remnants; and a pelisse from 1839 might at that time have gone over with dashing success—if only it were dilapidated enough. Today, what remains from the frantic 'sixties is a youthful vogue for tired old lace and muslin underwear, which are now worn on the outside for romantically sordid effects—suggesting Bellocq and Brooke Shields.

Collecting ancient garments is nothing new among antique-clothes fanciers; but in fact "antique" is all you can call these garments, since you don't see anyone at the theater in an old 1839 pelisse right now, any more than you did in 1879. A precise degree of outdatedness is currently desirable—within strict temporal limits: you don't see miniskirts at the theater, either, or stiff bell-shaped skirts bursting out below tightly boned bodices.

At the moment, to qualify as being acutely wearable, old clothes must date roughly from the years 1920-1950—a significant era in the history of national taste. During that epoch, the two most important influences on the look of modern dress took firm hold of America: mass production and the movies. These combined to create out of the clothed figure a sleek, compact object, enduringly captured on film in a sleek, animated camera image. Our taste in personal looks has been founded on it ever since. *(Continued on page 305)*

Vogue April 1979

CLOTHES BOOM

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All our conceptions of classic modern clothing—our ideas of appropriate modern conventions, of the way dress may express ease and comfort, briskness and breeziness, glamour and sophistication, innocence and simplicity—were crystallized during the golden days of Hollywood. Following all the unsettling changes in established habits of dress and manner that came with the First World War, and after it, the movies were what gave us a solid and unified new standard of dressed looks and gestures for our time.

It didn't matter if shoulders were sloped or broad, if skirts were high or low, or if hats tilted at different angles as the years passed. The modes were all united by the magic of cinematography. It captured all styles of modern manufactured clothes in their most ideal moments—when they were worn by stars moving through a steadily glittering simulacrum of real life—and established the twentieth-century look once and for all. And so, in this century's second half, we uniquely possess, intact, our ideal visual past. We can still watch Gloria Swanson or Gloria De Haven, alive and vibrant as the camera first saw them, and just as crisply draped in their different modes—and we can love them equally.

Indeed, as it turns out, we can have our sartorial past back, too. Not only the camera images but the clothes themselves survive intact, because mass-produced clothes are made to be discarded, not remade or worn out. They have lasted, shelved in limbo like cans of film, waiting for these appreciative days to dawn. Now sought at last by a retrospective visual understanding, these clothes have emerged and flowered again in shops all over the country.

Today's love for old clothes is bound up with today's love for old movies. This current double passion itself is a sign not of morbid reaction and sick camp but of creative health in the allied arts of film and dress. Our new habit of paying close attention to the special qualities of old films and old garments amounts to a rise in the esthetic status of each. No longer perceived as facile, ephemeral, and silly, modern films and modern clothes are being encompassed by our expanding sense of what the possibilities are for modern art itself.

Neither the love of old movies nor the love of old clothes is now a private obsession on the part of a few; but both are common public and domestic pleasures. Movies no longer go out of date. The entire movie past is repeatedly being recaptured, reappreciated in all its fresh, old glory. It keeps teaching our eager eyes to caress and know and accept those shoulders—square or hunched—those pompadours, those draped and sequined crêpe dresses with varying levels of hem, while their wearers go through their rituals of love and suffering and laughter and bring honest tears to our receptive eyes.

> "All our conceptions of classic modern clothing . . . were crystallized during the golden days of Hollywood"

Just as new movies now refer to old film conventions, current fashion echoes the elements of earlier styles. This might look like the kind of return fashion so often makes; but the difference is that, like much current film, *la mode rétro* is self-conscious. It shows signs of being a *deliberate* reference to familiar themes, not an authentic rediscovery of basic material. In the recent mode, the elegance and conventional formality of dated clothes are subtly admired and mocked simultaneously: a critical distance from them is steadily maintained, both in the look of new fashions and in the creative resurrection of old clothes.

Most emphatically, it is not the spirit of campy nostalgia that is at work now. There is no frivolous sentimentality in the new direct use or the indirect adaptation of old clothes; just as there is none in the newly developed responsiveness to the conventions of old movies. Art has always referred to itself, demonstrating its awareness of its own traditions and internally acknowledging debts to its own past. Perhaps, in all these recent manifestations, we are at last seeing the art of dress, like that of film, catching up a bit with poetry and with painting. ▽

Timeliest Vintage Clothes

Look for boutiques with a past—like Manhattan's **Jezebel,** at 265 Columbus Avenue. Owner **Albert Wright** specializes in 'forties dresses—silky, easy-to-wear. She's even got pill-box hats—with veils. . . . **Harriet Love,** at 412 West Broadway, New York City, features men's and women's clothing from 1920 to 1950: everything from Hawaiian shirts to old lamé handbags. It's all original, and in excellent repair. . . . Find 'thirties and 'forties treasures at San Francicco's **Old Gold,** 2304 Market street. It looks like a giant period department store, complete with Big Band music. . . . **Pauli's Fantasy,** at 400 Broadway, S.F., is where you can find (according to owner Pauli) "the peacocks of the antique clothing world." The garments are dressy, strictly feminine. With luck, you might even find a pair of Chinese opera pajamas. . . . On May 10, at 8:00 P.M., ET, be at **Christie's East** (Christie's New York's newest branch at 219 East Sixty-seventh Street) for a rare auction of "Couturier Clothes of This Century: 1900 to 1960." **Fortuny, Worth, Poiret, Balenciaga, Chanel** are among the many designers represented. Some special offerings: **Charles James**'s dresses from 1949 and 1950—never before exhibited publicly—and evening gowns designed by **Cecil Beaton.**

Anne Hollander, *an art historian, is the author of "Seeing Through Clothes" (Viking), a philosophical inquiry into the role that costume plays in art.*

BOOK BOOM

(Continued from page 273)

one knows the exact figure—which suggests that "rationalization" has yet a way to go). Many of these bookshops describe themselves as "literary"; but most art in fact no more (or less) literary than the chains, they stock the same current books and are different primarily in being small and independently owned. And, it is estimated, half of them are in trouble, barely breaking even or losing money.

What, then, is "literary"? One interesting yardstick was recently applied by the publicly supported information center Poets & Writers, Inc. Poets & Writers surveyed the stores to find out which carried small-press publications—small presses being mostly literary (or so thought of, anyway) and, as a practical matter, much more difficult and time-consuming than commercial publishers for the small-bookshop owner to deal with. Some two hundred and sixty bookshops (in every state but Nevada) carry small-press publications. This narrows things down somewhat, but it's a shaky yardstick: In many shops, these small-press publications are the tiniest of sidelines; and the publications themselves cannot be guaranteed to be "literary"—an increasing number are how-to-do-its (cooking, drug farming, solar-home building) and inspirationals (spiritual self-improvement through Yoga and the like), which suggests that "literary" is a specialty.

> Why is America falling in love with literature?

Books & Co. is a specialty shop. Co-owned and run by Jeannette Watson (of the IBM Watsons) and Burt Britton (famous in the book trade as, for years, the chief buyer of reviewers' copies for the great second-hand Strand Book Store on New York's lower Broadway at Twelfth Street), Books & Co. is dedicated to adult quality literature in a way that few other bookstores ever have been. In this hard-core specialty, its only rival in Manhattan is the venerable and beloved Gotham Book Mart and Gallery on Forty-seventh Street just east of the Avenue of the Americas.

Books & Co. is a small store—two floors, each measuring about seventy-five feet long and sixteen feet wide—with books shelved and stacked and piled everywhere you look. Where there aren't books, there are people; partly—but only partly—because of the enormous publicity the store has received, it has become a Mecca for book lovers, and a tourist attraction as well. Much of the publicity is directly due to the bearded Britton, who is both knowledgeable and free-

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