

REELIN' IN THE YEARS

BOOMER MEN ATTRACTED TO AGE-DEFYING APPAREL

For the generation that grew up singing, "I hope I die before I get old," and living by the mantra, "Don't trust anyone over 30," hanging onto youth isn't merely a wish; it's an obsession. And so grows a fashion trend.

Baby Boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964, grew up breaking the rules. They were hippies turned yuppies, the "Psychedelic Generation" turned into the "Me Generation." Their fashions defined '60s surf culture, '70s disco and '80s new wave. They were hip to the groove and many want to stay that way.

"I don't feel old, so why should I look it?" asks Mickey, 56, a Florida antiques dealer who sells his goods on eBay. "I recently shaved my head, grew a beard and got an earring. I'm not giving up yet."

Neither are the majority of Baby Boomers.

"I'm 50 but I don't think I'm 50," says Marty Samuels, president of Quiksilver, the surf brand with 380 stores. "Right now I have on jeans and a Quiksilver T-shirt. I'm not the target customer, but there are a lot of guys that relate to the brand. They wore it at 15 or 20 and still like it. Or, it just speaks to a youthful mentality. A lot of Boomers don't know the 'rule' that they're supposed to shop in main floor and not wander over to young men's."

But Boomer men like to buy what speaks to them. According to Cotton Incorporated's Lifestyle Monitor™, the Boomer man spends an average of nearly \$61 a month on apparel. And when you consider there are 38 million male Boomers, with 5,000 of them turning 50 each day, it's a market worth tapping.

A lot of the older Boomers have already put their kids through school and now have extra cash for the first time in years. And the younger Boomers — the group that didn't get married until 30 and have kids until 40 — definitely don't want to look like their dads.

"In a Boomer's mind, the elastic-band waist on shirts, pants and jackets is considered 'my father's look,'" says Tom Julian, trend analyst with Fallon Worldwide. "This guy is more likely to be active and modern-minded. He travels, he sees the world —sometimes online as well as in person. He's not into aging."

Julian says the desire to remain youthful goes beyond a trend, stemming instead from cultural influences. To wit, top stars like Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt and Pierce Brosnan —all Boomers — are still churning out action flicks. And rockers like Bruce Springsteen, U2 and The Rolling Stones are still kicking it hard. After years of watching women work to stay young, men are now feeling pressured to keep up.

"Once somebody hits the mid-40s, plastic surgery stops being a joke," says Bob Abbiati, owner of The Wyckoff Ivy Shop in affluent Bergen County, NJ. "Everybody is trying to stay as young as they can. My parents' generation was happy to have a hot meal on the table. With Boomers, you give us a cucumber, we'll slice it up and put it on our eyes."



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AMOUNT SPENT BY MALE CONSUMERS ON CLOTHES IN THE PAST MONTH

	40-44	45-49	50-55	56-61
None	31%	31%	37%	37%
\$1 to \$50	24%	22%	21%	21%
\$51 to \$100	22%	28%	17%	21%
\$101 to \$200	14%	11%	11%	15%
Over \$200	9%	8%	13%	5%
Average	\$63.75	\$61.00	\$63.75	\$54.75

And if 40, 50 or even — as the cover of AARP proclaimed — 60 is the new 30, manufacturers would do well to design hip clothes that fit the aging male physique.

Tommy Hilfiger responded to Boomer demand with his H Hilfiger line, using rock icon David Bowie and wife Iman as spokespeople.

But Abbiati says Boomer customers that used to pick up a Billabong or Rusty surf shirt as part of their vacation apparel generally don't fit into the slimmed down sizes that are currently the trend.

The Monitor reports that when a man stops wearing a garment, it's overwhelmingly (at nearly 49%) because it doesn't fit anymore. Only 10% stop wearing something because it's gone out of style.

"We have guys who were a size 34 going to a 36, or a size 36 going to 38," Abbiati says. "And with everything a tighter silhouette, fit is a problem. So, Tommy Bahama fits the bill. And we have Nat Nast coming this fall. Guys also like jeans by Alberto and Mavi. They've got stretch, so even though it's a trimmer fit, the fabric goes over the lumps and bumps more easily."



The Monitor finds that no matter what their age, men love their jeans. To the statement, "Jeans are in my past, not my future," 88% disagreed.

Julian says denim "is more than a five-pocket jean. I like the offering from Tommy Bahama with indigo palms; the lifestyle look of Lucky; the Euro jean from Zegna."

The vintage movement, Julian says, also has big Boomer appeal. "Think about the retro cool of Nat Nast that Charlie Sheen wears on Two and a half Men. There's a hipness in knowing something about a label."

Op, another popular brand when Boomers were kids, targets older customers with its Ocean Pacific line. "Ocean Pacific is for our initial customer who's grown up now with kids of their own and doesn't want to go to a surf shop," says Alain Mazer, spokesperson. "It's sold at mid-tier department and sporting goods stores — where Baby Boomers are most likely to shop. It's for guys who are still active. I was at the beach the other day and saw a guy who was at least 48 pulling in the biggest barrel of the day."

Although the Boomer generation of today is getting older, that doesn't mean they have to look it, especially with all the age-defying choices in apparel currently available at retail.

This story is one in a series of articles based on findings from Cotton Incorporated's Lifestyle Monitor™ tracking research. Each story will focus on a specific topic as it relates to the American men's wear consumer and his attitudes and behavior regarding clothing, appearance, fashion, fiber selection and many other timely, relevant subjects.



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