

Schott NYC

Perfecto jacket

Black leather and metal

Circa 1980, USA

The Museum at FIT, P89.29.1

Museum purchase

This *Perfecto* jacket has the same construction as the original 1928 horsehide design, first created by the Schott Brothers for manufacture by Harley-Davidson. Its black leather, chrome hardware, asymmetrically zipped front, and belted waist have been so successful that Schott still produces the *Perfecto* design today.

Anatomy of the *Perfecto* biker jacket

Illustration by Paula Sim

School of Graduate Studies

Catalog page (reproduction)

“Two-Collar Motorcycle Jacket”

Sears, Roebuck and Co.

Fall/Winter 1951, p. 511

*Fashion Institute of Technology|SUNY, FIT Library
Dept. of Special Collections and FIT Archives*

Mass manufacturers were inspired by the pragmatic design of the *Perfecto* long before its inclusion in high-fashion collections. This version, by Sears, Roebuck and Co., includes special zippered pockets for a map and cigarettes, a leather harness to support the rider’s kidneys, and a detachable lambskin collar.

Harley-Davidson Jacket

Black leather and metal

1983, USA

*The Museum at FIT, 2013.30.1
Gift of Pepper Hemingway*

This is likely a woman’s jacket, as indicated by the orientation of the front zipper closure to the wearer’s left. In its 1954 catalog, Harley-Davidson featured its first woman’s jacket—called the “Ladies Companion Jacket.”

The Wild One

Film still

1953

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Marlon Brando epitomized the mid-century American “bad boy” when he played Johnny Strabler in the film *The Wild One*. Many teenagers adopted his cuffed jeans, t-shirt, *Perfecto* jacket—and delinquent attitude. In reaction, some American high schools prohibited the biker jacket, and *The Wild One* was banned in Britain until 1967.

Tear sheet

“Cyclists Holiday: He and Friends Terrorize the Town”

Photograph by Barney Peterson

Life, July 21, 1947, p. 31

Arrest of Motorcyclist

Photograph by Barney Peterson

1947

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When Hollister, California, hosted a three-day motorcycle tour in 1947, more bikers attended than were expected. Their allegedly riotous behavior became the inspiration for the 1953 film *The Wild One*, and furthered the “rebellious” reputation of biker gangs in general.

Tear sheet

Back of Hells Angels vest

Anne-Laure Quilleriet, *The Leather Book*, p. 166

Tear sheet

Embellished biker jackets

Mick Farren, *The Black Leather Jacket*, p. 55

Patches, such as this example from the Hells Angels, are a common method of identification in biker clubs. Embroidered insignia, metal studs, and elaborately painted designs express wearers' individuality as well as their club identification.

Versace Versus

(Gianni Versace)

Man's jacket

Black leather and gold metal
1993, Italy

The Museum at FIT, 2005.40.11
Gift of Michael Sherman

The back fringe, "nail head" embellishments, and gold-tipped lapels on this *Perfecto*-like silhouette are evocative of styles associated with the Old West. Elements such as metallic top-stitching and logo zipper pulls add a touch of Versace's signature extravagance.

Tear sheet

Teens in black leather biker jackets

Mick Farren, *The Black Leather Jacket*, p. 46

This jacket was made by the British motorcycle company, Triumph. Like their American counterparts, early British “greaser” teens had an affinity for black leather biker jackets, rockabilly music, and motorcycles.

Stowaways aboard United Airlines plane

1952

USC Libraries Special Collections

University of Southern California

Rebellious adolescents wearing the biker jacket often defied conformity, not only in their unruly manner and dress, but also by sometimes committing criminal acts. This further cemented the biker jacket’s “outlaw” image.

Emporio Armani

(Giorgio Armani)

Man's jacket

Black leather and metal

Circa 1982, Italy

The Museum at FIT, 90.149.21

Gift of Jean François Daigre

This jacket is Armani's tailored take on the biker jacket. It combines a softer, symmetrical look with hard-edged, exposed snap accents along the shoulders and belt loops. In order to attract a younger consumer, Armani created a subdued, high-quality version of an Italian street style.

Magazine

Model wearing a Christian Dior jacket

by Yves Saint Laurent

"Leather: Great New Fashion Natural"

Photograph by Irving Penn

Vogue, October 1960, pp.122-123

Vogue highlights Saint Laurent's controversial "beatnik" collection for Christian Dior, calling his variation on the motorcycle jacket (left) "the most *avant* of his leather stunners." Saint Laurent introduced Left Bank Parisian street style into high-fashion—and may have inadvertently prompted his termination from Dior the following year.

Yves Saint Laurent (Stefano Pilati) Jumpsuit ensemble

Black leather
Fall 2009, France

*The Museum at FIT, 2010.90.1
Gift of Yves Saint Laurent*

Yves Saint Laurent continued to draw inspiration from the biker jacket after opening his own couture house in 1962. Decades later, Stefano Pilati also referenced the biker jacket in this sleek jumpsuit he designed for Saint Laurent, incorporating exposed zippers and an asymmetrical front.

Tear sheets

Models wearing biker jackets

“Wild at Heart”

Photography by Peter Lindbergh
Vogue, September 1991, pp.490-491

“The Wild Ones”

Photograph by Lachlan Bailey
W, September 2013, p. 291

Since the 1960s, the biker jacket has been a fixture in fashion editorials, which often reference the jacket’s history. The September 1991 issue of *Vogue* (left) features biker jackets by Chanel. Over twenty years later, *W Magazine* (right) shows that the jacket remains on trend.

Alexander Wang

Lookbook

Model wearing leather jacket

Fall/Winter 2009-2010, pp. 5-6

Fashion Institute of Technology/SUNY, FIT Library

This biker jacket retains the angular structure of the *Perfecto*, yet it is softened by the use of white leather and feather embellishments along the sleeves, creating a look that is both androgynous and animalistic.

Carolina Herrera Jacket

Black cotton velvet and metal
1989, USA

The Museum at FIT, 92.39.8
Gift of Paul Siskin

Designer Carolina Herrera created a high-fashion jacket with a theatrical flair. The belted waist, asymmetrically zipped front, and cropped silhouette retain the look of the *Perfecto*, but the eye-catching studs and luxurious velvet provide aggressive, glamorous appeal.

The Ramones, *Rocket to Russia*

Vinyl record album jacket

Design by John Holmstrom

Cardboard

1976, USA

Sire Records

The jackets worn by the Ramones on the cover of their third album were essential to the look of these punk rockers. Their “uniform” consisted not only of the black biker jacket, but also a t-shirt, ripped jeans, and tennis shoes.

Michael Jackson, *Bad*

Vinyl record album jacket

Front cover photograph

by Roberta Bayley

Cardboard

1987 (reprinted 2009), USA

Epic Records

Punk and heavy metal artists were not the only rock musicians attracted to the biker jacket. The example worn by Michael Jackson on the cover of his pop-rock album *Bad* showed a sleeker, sexier version of the jacket’s tough look.

Judas Priest,
Defenders of the Faith
Vinyl record album jacket
Design by Doug Johnson

Cardboard
1984, USA
Columbia Records

The members of Judas Priest often include heavily adorned biker jackets in their wardrobes. This heavy-metal rock band is known for its studded S&M leather looks.

Claude Montana

Man's vest

Black leather

1973, France

The Museum at FIT, 2005.40.7

Gift of Michael Sherman

This vest recalls the look of garments worn by bikers who cut the sleeves off their jackets, a practice later adopted by leathersex enthusiasts. Designer Claude Montana was known for referencing leather subcultures in addition to his expertise at working with leather.

Tear sheets

Leatherman style in San Francisco

“Homosexuality in America”

Photograph by Bill Epridge

Life Magazine, June 26, 1964 pp. 66-67

These men at a bar in San Francisco are known as “leathermen,” members of gay leather subculture. The leatherman look first emerged during the 1950s. Bondage pieces and leather garments, such as those sold by motorcycle manufacturers, were used to create a dark, hyper masculine look.

Robin Laurance

Photograph

Guests in leather at Karl Lagerfeld’s party
November 10, 1977, Paris

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Dept. of Special Collections and FIT Archives

Guests at a 1977 party thrown for designer Karl Lagerfeld were required to wear black leather. Many of them took inspiration from punks and leather subcultures. When Lagerfeld became creative director at Chanel in 1983, he introduced biker wear to the high-fashion label, mixing items like the classic Chanel tweed jacket with leather pants.

Jean Paul Gaultier

Woman's jacket

Shearling, leather, suede, and wool
1987, France

The Museum at FIT, 2000.23.10
Gift of Anne M. Zartarian

Jean Paul Gaultier's jacket combines a type of wool pinstripe material worn by businessmen with metal spikes that are reminiscent of punk style. Gaultier was a master of mixing fabrics; his influences likewise drew on a variety of sources.

Mark Perry

Fanzine

Cover page featuring the Sex Pistols

“Pin Up: Sex Pistols”

Sniffin' Glue, Issue 8, ca. 1976, front cover

Fashion Institute of Technology/SUNY, FIT Library

Dept. of Special Collections and FIT Archives

Tear sheet

Punk teens wearing biker jackets

Anne-Laure Quilleriet,

The Leather Book, p.200

The fanzine at left was created by Mark Perry in an effort to produce punk literature outside of an established corporation. The do-it-yourself mentality of punk extended to clothing styles. Not unlike members of biker gangs, punks would often embellish their jackets, as did the Sex Pistols and many punk teens (right).

Helmut Lang

Man's ensemble

Black moleskin, cotton jersey, cotton,
leather
Spring 2004, USA

The Museum at FIT, 2009.32.25
Gift of Helmut Lang

Helmut Lang challenged the traditional function of the biker jacket as a heavy, protective garment. He constructed his jacket using cotton instead of leather in order to make it feel weightless, a concept that is furthered by its cut-out details and removable back flap.

Rick Owens

Suit

Off-black denim, wool felt, leather,
grey ribbed knit
Fall 2008, France

The Museum at FIT, 2010.94.1
Gift of Rick Owens

Distressed black leather and asymmetrical zippers link this ensemble to the archetypal biker jacket. By pushing the boundaries of the original biker jacket design, Owens skillfully integrated sculptural details that are typical of his rebellious and refined style.

Rick Owens

Jacket

Black leather, wool jersey
Spring 2014, France

The Museum at FIT, 2013.91.1
Gift of Rick Owens

Rick Owens has described his “classic biker jacket” as “part Levi’s jacket, part biker jacket, part Madeleine Vionnet—all that, cut apart and somehow Scotch-taped together.” Panels of stretch jersey on the inner sleeves allow this jacket to hug the wearer’s body, creating a uniquely slim fit.

Comme des Garçons (Rei Kawakubo) Ensemble

Black leather, pink and white cotton
gingham, pink nylon tulle, and
polyester chiffon
Spring 2005, *Biker + Ballerina* collection,
Japan

The Museum at FIT, 2005.49.1
Museum purchase

Rei Kawakubo conveys the commanding force of the biker jacket without imitating its familiar features. This saddle-stitched, sculptural jacket is paired with a pink gingham skirt, a disparate combination that calls forth both the power of motorcycles and the strength of ballerinas.

Balenciaga (Nicolas Ghesquière) Evening dress

Black patent leather and silk enamel
Spring 2007, France

The Museum at FIT, 2007.44.1
Gift of Balenciaga

This evening dress bears little resemblance to the *Perfecto*, but it was inspired by *The Terminator*, a science fiction movie featuring a cyborg wearing a biker jacket. Designer Nicolas Ghesquière combined references to 1950s couture with the imagery of cars and cyberculture, creating a futuristic twist on an elegant staple.



Terminator 2: Judgment Day

Film still

1996

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