

# FREESTYLE

Clara Young on how après-ski style has snowballed to include denim and streetwear touches.



Designer Giambattista Valli brought the slopes to the runway at the Moncler Gamme Rouge fall/winter 2016 show.



In all but the most charmed lives, things go downhill sometimes. Fashion's downhill trajectory is not so tragic—if only because we are talking about “downhill” of the skiing and snowboarding variety. It conjures up lovely, cheerful things like champagne powder and bunny slopes. “We love to snowboard mostly; it’s funniest, and you get so much adrenalin!” write style schussers Dean and Dan Caten of DSquared2. The Twins of the Great White North have, at long last, produced their inaugural skiwear collection. And because the Catens are Canadian, DSquared2 skiwear is, of course, the definitive word on all things snowy and stylish.

Ski clothes didn’t start out fashionable. When populations beyond the Nordics caught on to the sport in the ’20s, it was woolly and long-skirted. And very brown. There were exceptions: Designers Lucien Lelong and Madeleine Vionnet took on skiwear in the ’30s, as did Hermès and Jean Patou.

Synthetics cheered things up on the slopes with colour and curves. German manufacturer Klaus Obermeyer made quilted parkas with bright, snappy-hued nylon outer shells. A few years later, so did the French brand Moncler. At around the same time, Willy and Maria Bogner, in Munich, invented skiwear’s iconic tight, stretchy stirrup pants.

The classic skiwear vernacular was born, but it took Emilio Pucci to freestyle it. Pucci was an aristocrat, descended from one of the oldest families in Italy. He was also a devilishly good skier and a member of the Italian Olympic ski team. Bored with the Old World, Pucci showed up one day on the slopes of Mount Hood in Oregon in 1937. He enrolled at Reed College and became the school’s ski instructor. He fashioned the team’s parallel turns to perfection and, inevitably, their uniforms too. Though a fashion

autodidact (he did his master’s degree in social science at Reed and also studied agriculture in Athens), he was a dab hand at designing ski outfits. An Italian fashion photographer saw one of Pucci’s suits at Zermatt in 1948, and the rest is history. The sighting snowballed into Pucci’s first collection—with the blessing of *Harper’s Bazaar* editor Diana Vreeland. She dug the slaloming swirls and popping colours, which later became the hallmark of Pucci’s silk-jersey dresses.

In deference to the master, Pucci’s newest creative director, Massimo Giorgetti, has taken the label to the backcountry. Turtleneck sweaters and puffy coats sport images of soaring snow-capped peaks. It is the stuff of heli-skiers’ dreams, the pristine slopes as splendid and awesome as the ones in *bergfilmes*—the German mountain films so immensely popular in the 1920s. In the mystic, fog-bound glory of these

films, directors like Leni Riefenstahl and Arnold Fanck showed men conquering mountains. But the mountains conquered the climbers too, honing and testing their character with ice, snow, rocks and treacherous headwalls. The silver-foil jackets, ski-boot clasps and colliding shards of alpine graphics at Pucci express this mountainous will to power. So do the flaglike colour blocking and Olympic-speed-skating suit.

Skiing and mountaineering are also the themes of London designer Sadie Williams’ Off Piste collection, but the tone is nostalgic rather than heroic. Shown against a painted mountain backdrop amid slalom gates were Williams’ silvered leathers, old-time hiking boots, vintage Olympic graphics, Lurex stripes and quilted-nylon dirndl skirts. Her patchwork kilts have alpine-cabin appeal. “I came across these great old photos of my parents on a skiing holiday when they were a young couple,” says Williams. “I loved that they seemed so happy and carefree and were mixing sporty quilted skiwear with their own clothes and scarves in checks and tartans.” The wardrobe she designed suits cozy Cortina, not glitzy Gstaad.

Gstaad, St. Moritz and Breuil-Cervinia are DSquared2 territory and, incidentally, where the Catens go snowboarding. While Williams and, to a lesser extent, Giorgetti have used ski memes in everyday clothes, the Catens have done the reverse. They built their first skiwear line around a no-no on the slopes: denim. There’s nothing more gauche than schralping the gnar in a pair of soggy Jordaches, one would think. Yet Dean and Dan beg to differ. They would have us at Courchevel 1850 in mac jackets (fur-trimmed) and ripped jeans (stretchy, with waterproof lining). “Denim is versatile, sporty and glamorous, and at the same time it is part of our DNA,” they say. “We are designers, and we love snowboarding, even skiing. Who better than us to create a ski collection?”

The Catens are bringing Canadian smarts to skiwear because fashion wants in on the eternal duel between man and mountain. The trend isn’t après-skiwear with a mug of Irish coffee in your hand but clothes that look like you can send it straight to Gucci plateau—or know what that means. The look calls for Jean-Claude Killy ski sweaters, like the ones at Lacoste, J.W. Anderson and Off-White, or a velvety Lacoste track outfit with zigzaggy skiers on it. Fashion’s going downhill, but, for once, that’s good news. □

## SKI CLUB

Charting the trajectory of slope style.



**1944**  
A woman models a skiing outfit by French designer Jean Patou.



**1946**  
A sporty cover of Harper’s Bazaar



**1969**  
Legendary model Veruschka lounges in the snow in head-toe Emilio Pucci.



**1986**  
Diana, Princess of Wales, skiing in Klosters, Switzerland



**2016**  
The Dream, Kourtney Kardashian, Kanye West and Kim Kardashian take skiwear to luxe heights on their Icelandic adventure.

PHOTOGRAPHY: IMAXTREE (RUNWAY) AND GETTY IMAGES (VERUSCHKA & PRINCESS DIANA)