



RED
HOT
and
BLUE

America's love affair with
jeans heats up...

by Andrea E. McHugh | Photography by Cory Silken



Madrid Crown Jeans by Victoria Beckham for Rock and Republic from Kristina Richards Studio

Not as renowned as the search for the Holy Grail, but as intriguing as that quest, is the endless pursuit for the perfect pair of jeans. Resonating across every demographic is the love for a good pair. Today, denim has reached an entirely new designer level, with the chicest of the chic pairs popping up in Newport's trendiest boutiques.

It is what ties us together as Americans, our common denim thread, our one true thing: we wear jeans. Boot cut, stone wash, low rise, bell-bottom; no matter what denim secret lies in your dresser drawers, jeans have become an American standard. An all-new breed of designer denim decadence has emerged, however, and these pricey pairs are here to stay.

"They have finally mastered a great combination of stretch and cotton," says Laura Flynn, commenting on the evolution of imported fabrics used in most designer denim brands. Flynn is the mastermind behind Newport's Laura Jean, a specialty shop built entirely around a devotion to designer denim. Along with her buyer, Melissa Pattavina, Flynn has brought a flotilla of exclusive labels like Chip & Pepper, Antik Denim and Yanuk to the City-by-the-Sea. The twosome scour fashion magazines, trendy boutiques in New York and other

label-conscious locales to get a gauge on the hottest styles. "Consumers, especially women, are savvy nowadays," says Flynn. "They know what they want."

The 1980s saw the launch of designer denim to the mass market. Gloria Vanderbilt, Sassoon, Calvin Klein, Sergio Valente and Jordasche jeans became hot commodities, with ad campaigns introducing the idyllic pairing of fashion and celebrity. Unforgettably, Brooke Shields caused quite the commotion when she, as a young

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teenager, announced, "Nothing comes between me and my Calvin's." Today, the high-end jean bar has been raised and a new genre of jean has hit the streets of Newport.

This new wave of premium denim might cause initial sticker shock, with styles ranging from \$98 to \$298 a pair, but designer jean converts will convince you these pricey pairs are much more than just a badge of butt-hugging bling. Crisp, clean and cut to perfection, designer denim is slowly being suggested as an investment piece to com-

plement any wardrobe. "Looking good means feeling good," says Flynn. "I have customers come in to buy high-end jeans for many reasons: it's their birthday, they just had a baby and want to get back into 'normal' clothes, or they just want to treat themselves." To be rational, jeans do have a seasonless fashionability, so you get your money's worth with a good denim purchase; at least that's what the buyers will tell you (or their husband). "In my opinion, you will always have designer denim," says Annabelle Harris, owner of Annabelle's on Thames Street. "If you have a pair of jeans that's classic in style and fits well, you will continue to wear them year after year." Annabelle's originally opened as a lingerie shop, but the demand for quality denim became apparent. She explains, "Denim fits really well with the concept of the store because just like underwear, jeans are something you wear on a daily basis."

Flynn's repeat customers as well, make the case for the value of designer denim, insisting that the fit and feel is what is most important. Unique pairs, featuring elaborate embroidery, jeweled embellishments and detailed stitching, draw the most discriminate shoppers to both shops.

Adding a designer pair of jeans to your denim repertoire should be an enjoyable

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Antik Denim Western Jean from Laura Jean