

Soaring In Style: Amelia Earhart Fashions

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As a pioneering aviatrix, breaking stereotypes and setting new societal standards earned Amelia Earhart a collection of aviation records and achievements. As the sixteenth woman in the world to receive a pilot's licence, the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic, and the first woman to make a transcontinental flight, "Lady Lindy" is remembered for her mysterious disappearance. However, one achievement she is rarely credited for is the creation of the first celebrity fashion line.

In 1932, after her first flight across the Atlantic Ocean, Earhart found herself short of funds to continue her aviation career. She and her husband, George Charles Putnam, desperately needed to generate a new source of income. After an inspiring visit with prominent Italian fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli, Earhart ventured into creating her own fashion line. She had some background in sewing and design; as a teenager, she made some of her own clothes and in 1929 she designed a flying suit specifically for women, after being limited to wear ill-fitting male suits. Earhart and her husband started their clothing line in their suite at Hotel Seymour in New York City, with only a sewing machine and mannequin.



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Amelia Earhart Fashions debuted at R.H Macy & Co. in late 1933 and spread to thirty stores nationwide. The line consisted of twenty-five ready-to-wear garments and included dresses,



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skirts, tops, pants, wool coats, trench coats, and outerwear. The line was also the first to market tops and bottoms as "separates" to women. Before, suit jackets and skirts were sold together, resulting in women having to alter the garments at home to ensure a proper fit. But the clothing line sold tops and bottoms individually, allowing women to buy the individual pieces in different sizes if necessary. It also allowed women to mix and match different jackets and bottoms, letting them experiment with different styles. Additionally, Earhart introduced blouses with longer shirrtails, a design feature from men's tops, to prevent the shirts from coming untucked, riding up, and exposing women's skin and undergarments. Earhart stated "I made up my mind that if the wearers of the shirts I designed for any reason took time out to

stand on their heads, there would still be enough shirt to still stay tucked in!”

Earhart designed the clothing collection with practicality in mind. She tailored her clothes to fit the needs of the “active woman.” The fashion line was considered a sportswear collection because of the casual nature of the clothes. The dresses were made with wrinkle free fabric and all the pieces were washable. The fashion line deviated from traditional women’s clothing, allowing Earhart to express her feeling that women were capable of anything. She stated “I tried to put the freedom that is in flying into the clothes.”

Earhart also gave a nod to her pilot career by designing clothes inspired by aviation. Some of her clothes were made from parachute silk or airplane wing fabric. Additionally, she also included aviation inspired embellishments and accessories such as a propeller-shaped button, “a parachute cord or tie or belt, a ball-bearing belt buckle, wing bolts and nuts for buttons.”



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Amelia Earhart Fashions was a celebrity fashion line, so clothes were moderately-priced, with clothing ranging from \$30 to \$55 (\$594.22 to \$1,090.68 today). However, with the Great Depression affecting the economy, most women could not afford her pieces. In an effort to make her clothes more accessible to everyone, Earhart published her sewing patterns in the *Woman’s Home Companion* magazine, enabling women to make the clothes at home.

Sadly, with the worsening conditions of the depression, Amelia Earhart Fashions only lasted for one season. Although Earhart’s design career faded, the legacy of her fashion line and radical way of designing women’s clothing still lives on today. Amelia Earhart

inspired women with her unique sense of dressing. Her untraditional fashion style “popularized the wear of unrestricted garments.” The aviatrix sported “separate skirts and blouses, sturdy boots, oversized jackets,” ties, large belts, and scarves. These fashion statements are still prevalent today, with oversized jackets and large belts coming back into style. The aviatrix’s masculine style helped to normalize feminine pants and her celebrity status helped to influence female fashion trends for decades to come. By introducing “separates,” Earhart introduced a new way of dressing and forever changed how female fashion was marketed.



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