PHILIP GAY. Fashion Editor: Sheila Single; hair, Bruno Silvani at Jed Root, Inc; makeup, Maria Olsson at Jed Root, Inc.

GRAB IT!

Hester's bright idea of a power suit.

In Hester designer Tasha Green's hands, the three-piece suit has undergone a thoroughly modern transformation, swapping the more formal vest for a graphic blouse (like this color-block silk-crepe version that plays on a fifties camp shirt) and offering either a trouser or skirt to go with the jacket, inspired by a Thierry Mugler eighties power suit. "The pieces need to work from the office to cocktails," explains Green, a thrift-store regular. "So I created them to be worn together or as separates that blend with other pieces in a closet." Add pitch-perfect kaleidoscopic hues and these onetime conservative shapes are rendered unrecognizable. But the real selling point? Green's modern ensembles with a vintage feel ring in at under $500. "It's a new suit for a new economy!" she says optimistically. After all, "you need to buy the suit before you get the job!"—ESTHER ADAMS



WHAT COLOR IS YOUR PARACHUTE? HESTER JACKET ($229), CAMP SHIRT ($125), AND SKIRT ($145); HESTER-NYC.COM. CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN PUMPS, $795; CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN, NYC.

body—she would never wear a boxy suit," says Hendricks. "Joan and Betty and Peggy [January Jones and Elisabeth Moss] each have very different silhouettes—none of us would be caught dead in each other's clothes."

THE INCREDIBLE HEAVINESS OF BEING

Curious about what it must have been like to wear these kinds of clothes when you really had no other choice—not as a TV-show costume, nor even as an occasional, delightful foray into Vuitton or Prada land—I track down four actors who clearly remember sporting these looks the first time around.

"You got used to being strapped into things. I thought nothing of it. But oh, my gosh—it was wonderful when it ended!" recalls the legendary Angela Lansbury, who has appeared in everything from 1944's *Gaslight* to *A Little Night Music* on Broadway this year. "You had to be careful the garters didn't show through a tight skirt, so we put them on backward. The girdle not only compressed your lower body, it came up through the midsection, so you were really flat as a board."

Too bad Lansbury never told Rita Moreno about that trick. Moreno, who has been treading the boards for more than five decades, describes the prepantyhose era with no lingering affection. "We damn well wore stockings all the time, and of course it was horrific! It was hideous and hateful," she says. And Alexis Carrington, otherwise known as Joan Collins, insists, "I never wore a girdle; I didn't need to! I had a 23-inch waist."

(When I ask Jacobs how he achieved this same effect at Vuitton—did he raid vintage lingerie flea-market stalls all over the world? Were his models suffering the tortures of the damned?—he tells me, "The clothes actually have corsets built in; they're quite constructed underneath. And we designed a bra for a fifties silhouette.")

Dina Merrill, whose glorious frocks in the 1960 *BUtterfield 8* are a study in elegant simplicity (in fact, they evoke the spirit of this season's Dolce & Gabbana collection, with its velvet slip dresses and trim camel suits), says that though she, too, was stuck with those execrable girdles and garters, she was secretly a lover of trousers—"I sort of did my own thing."

WHAT MADE IT ALL WORTHWHILE, ALMOST

You may have been in agony on the inside, but on the outside you were a shimmering goddess of urbane sophistication. "People did dress to go out, and it provided a kind of drama and excitement. You wanted to really look marvelous!" Lansbury remembers with a tinge of sadness. "This has vanished from our society." Moreno says she thinks that clothes were much sexier when they showed just some skin. "I always loved a long-sleeved sheath with a bateau neckline or a plunging neck with a narrow V. That was awfully sexy, like teasing." And asked if there is anything she misses about the old days, fashion-wise, Collins readily concedes, "I don't think clothes today are at all seductive. That's what I most miss. There was a sense of flirtation in what one wore, without being overt." □

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