

# THE SLIM LOOK

*Before Bogner's stretch pants, streamlined skiwear was already in vogue. In the vanguard was skiing tailor Irving Margolese.*

Irving of Montreal traces his smooth sure line in a ski suit of unmistakable authority. Black wool gabardine. Exclusive with all Saks Fifth Avenue Ski Shops.



**SAKS FIFTH AVENUE**  
NEW YORK • CHICAGO • BEVERLY HILLS • DETROIT

This striking Saks Fifth Avenue advertisement appeared in a 1948 issue of *Town & Country* magazine devoted to skiing.

**BY JOHN FRY**

**T**he sleek modern skiwear look, it's typically thought, originated suddenly in 1952 with the Bavarian designer Maria Bogner's use of Helanca-modified nylon and wool blend to create the first durable stretch pant. (See "50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Stretch Pants," September 2002, *Skiing Heritage*.) But the body-hugging ski look was arguably more of an evolution than a revolution, as the pictures accompanying this article show. Bogner's revolution had as much to do with wildly varied colors replacing blacks and greys.

Even before World War II—a period associated in North American minds with skiers wearing wool sweaters and cloth jackets, and baggy trousers with socks pulled over the bottoms—a slim aerodynamic look was underway. French champion Emile Allais was wearing streamlined pants at the 1936 Olympic Winter Games. Known as *pantalons en fuseau*, they may have been introduced in the French Alps as early as 1932. About the same time Rudolph Kaegi, an American in Switzerland, spun acetate fiber Celanese into a springy spiral, then wove it with wool to produce the first stretch fabric, Helanca. But it quickly lost its stretch with laundering, returning in another form 20 years later.

Competing at the 1939 FIS World



Marjorie Benedikter (left) of Minneapolis modeled Irving pants and her own jacket design in 1948. Seven years later, stretch-suited designer Maria Bogner (right) appeared for the first time to Americans on the November 1955 cover of *SKI Magazine*. Her pants, unlike Irvings, did not sag or lose their stretch when worn and washed or dry-cleaned; note pant over boot top.



Alpine Ski Championships at Zakopane, Poland, Canadian racer Louis Cochand admired the ski “trousers” worn by a Polish prince. Made of a tight-weave grey gabardine, they were anything but baggy. Not only were they slim-fitting, the pants tapered down to a strap under the instep and inside the boot. Outer socks disappeared, tucked out of sight.

Cochand bought a pair and took them home to show to his friend Irving Margolese, a Montreal tailor who skied. Evidently Margolese was seized by the idea of replicating and marketing the pants. Importing them would have been impossible, though. Only seven months after the Zakopane ski championships, German troops invaded Poland, and World War II was underway.

Soon after the war—a time when bombed-out factories in Europe were still being rebuilt—in Canada Margolese was able to bring his pants into full-scale production. Using his tailoring skills to design and make a prototype and patterns, he had a manufacturing resource immediately at hand.

“Montreal was the largest apparel manufacturing center in Canada, and one of the largest in North America,” says Montreal journalist and ski writer Rochelle Lash. “It was mostly composed of Jewish people who’d escaped persecution in Russia and eastern Europe before World War I. They came in droves to Ellis Island, and many to Montreal. At one time, Yiddish was Montreal’s third most widely used language, after English and French.”

Once available in production quantities, Margolese’s business exploded in size as skiers craved to be seen in his Irving pants. In 1948 *TIME Magazine* hailed the 29-year-

old for “having parlayed a tailor shop with three employees into an estimated \$275,000-a-year-business.” (That’s \$2.9 million today, adjusted for inflation.) Saks Fifth Avenue carried Irving skiwear in its New York, Chicago, Detroit and Beverly Hills stores. A black gabardine Irving ski suit with a tan-colored yoke sold for \$79.95 (equal to \$840 today).

Racers jumped into the aerodynamically superior pants. The tight weave was more wind and water-proof. “You could have a serious face plant in deep ‘puder shnay,’ and still brush off the snow and hide the evidence,” says Louis Cochand’s son,



COURTESY CHAS COCHAND

The entire Canadian Ski Team wore Irving suits in St. Moritz, Switzerland, at the 1948 Winter Olympics, three years after the end of World War II.





GETTY IMAGES

Today's snowboard wear is similar in its bulkiness to the winter clothing often worn by skiers in the 1930s.



LEONARD ORTIZ/ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Charles. "Suddenly, you didn't have to dress sensibly to ski and survive!"

Fashion-conscious women donned Irvings. The beautiful Marjorie Benedikter and the new ski look were featured in the November 1948 issue of *Town & Country* magazine that was devoted to skiing. At the 1948 Winter Olympics in St. Moritz, the entire Canadian ski team was clothed in Irving suits.

*SKI Magazine* in 1948 carried advertisements not only for Irving's slim-

fitting ski suits and in-the-boot pants, but also ads from bigger sportswear makers like Harold Hirsch's White Stag and Jantzen, both of Portland, Oregon. Georgette Thiolière of France, MarSand of Boston, Slalom Ski Wear of Newport, Vermont, and March & Mendl of New York also advertised.

It wasn't until 1953 that Bogner fashions were first reported in *SKI*'s pages. The U.S. distributor was Hans Hagemeister. Stretch fabric was not mentioned, and the pants didn't look all that different from Irvings or White Stag. Bogner's big U.S. breakthrough came in 1955 when *SKI* featured Maria Bogner in a stunning stretch suit on the cover of its November issue.

A notable competitor, similar to Irving, was New York custom tailor Jules André, who started making gabardine ski pants in 1940.

"No tailor who is not a skier can make ski pants," he told *Sports Illustrated's* Felicia Lee in 1964. "Pants should follow the contours of the body exactly; they will then ride on the hips, and the legs should be narrow but not skintight."

When a 20-ounce blend of 60

percent wool and 40 percent Helanca fabric became available from Switzerland, André's business burgeoned. By the 1960s, he was offering stretch pants and suits in 70 colors, dominated by navy blue. His women's stretch pants cost \$49.50, men's \$59.50.

Legendary filmmaker Warren Miller once theorized that stretch-pant fashion made skiing sexy, and so was a major reason for the soaring number of new people entering the sport.

"I credit the growth of skiing in the Fifties and Sixties to Maria Bogner and her invention of stretch pants," wrote Miller. "Anyone who was in reasonable shape could put on a pair of stretch pants and look as sleek and attractive as a model in a James Bond movie. The pants did wonders for the female figure."

### FRED'S LAMENT

"When I was young, my face was schmooth and my pants were baggy. Now that I'm old, my face is baggy, but my pants are schmooth." —Fred Iselin, Aspen instructor, humorist, ski movie actor, commenting on the arrival of stretch pants in the 1950s.



COURTESY SANDRA HEATH

Longtime ISHA member Sandra Heath once modeled Bogner stretch pants.

Miller worried that his readers might call him sexist. "But someone," he confessed, "invented men and women and fortunately there is a difference in the way we are shaped. I, for one, appreciate that difference."

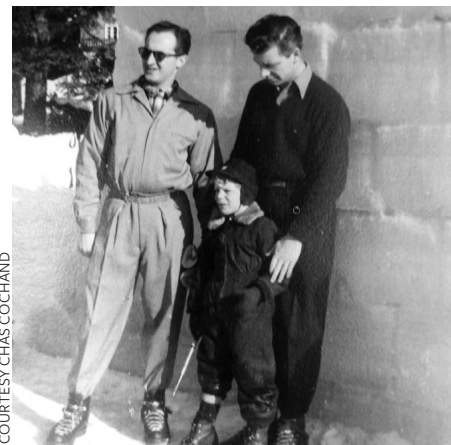
With the arrival of Bogner in the 1950s, and the rise of Roffe in the 1960s, Irving Margolese and Jules André were unable to survive the competitive onslaught. By the mid-1970s skiers were starting to favor more functional, warmer skiwear, concealing the body's features. Boobs and buttocks receded from view.

Warren Miller believed that the disappearance of the slim, extreme body-contouring look popularized by beautiful women and men like Stein Eriksen not only coincided with the decline in ski participation, it could have been its cause.

"Fashion designers pile on layers of waterproof breathable fabrics, sew leather on the shoulders so you can carry your skis, and then stuff in feathers for insulation," wrote Miller. "Even a *Sports Illustrated* model in this garb would look like a taxicab. Put a helmet on most skiers today and you can't tell whether they're men or women."

Ironically skiers came to be influenced by the images of extreme skiers wearing powder suits in the very movies that Miller made. Especially with the arrival of Gore-Tex, skiers were educated to the idea that "technical" skiwear was synonymous with comfort. Stretch eventually was relegated to fair weather and racing uniforms.

Finally, rebellious teenage snowboarders, garbed in baggy-looking suits, have gone all the way back to the kind of winter clothing worn by their grandparents 80 years ago. Fashion is cyclical...and maybe even circular. ❄️



Trend-setting tailor Irving Margolese (left) with Louis Cochand and Louis Jr., at the family-owned Chalet Cochand resort in Quebec's Laurentians.

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

In preparing this article, John Fry employed valuable research by Charles Cochand about Irving Margolese. Fry wore Irving pants in 1948 (right), a different look from what he wore for skiing in 1936 when he was six years old (left); at the time, kids often wore the same clothing they used for playing hockey. Today the Chairman of ISHA, Fry is the author of the award-winning *The Story of Modern Skiing*, about the revolution in equipment, resorts, technique and teaching, and ski competition between World War II and the end of the 20th century.



## ISHA ONLINE RESOURCES

### WHERE SENIORS SKI FREE

SeniorsSkiing.com has posted a new directory of North American resorts where older people can ski for free. It lists 145 ski areas, each with its own specific age requirements, from 55 to 90. Skiers 70 and older have a choice of 75 areas offering free skiing. The directory includes Canadian resorts for the first time.

Most of the listed areas offer totally free season passes and day passes to qualifying seniors. Also listed are areas charging \$125 or less for a season pass or \$25 or less for a day pass.

According to the National Ski Areas Association, 20 percent of all skiers and boarders in the United States are 52 or older. NSAA reports that the average U.S. skier hits the slopes 6.5 days per season. SeniorsSkiing.com reader surveys indicate that its average 67-year-old reader skis 16 days per season.

"Free skiing for seniors continues an industry tradition of encouraging older people to ski and rewarding them for their years of dedication to the sport. Unfortunately, those privileges are disappearing as many areas become holdings of large organizations," said Jon Weisberg, co-publisher of SeniorsSkiing.com. Even with advance purchase and senior

discounts, large destination resorts now charge up to \$150 for a day pass. To see the list, subscribe (for free) at <http://seniorsskiing.com>, or go to <https://tinyurl.com/seniors-ski-free>

### 2019 SKI AND BOOT BUYING GUIDE

For a limited time, ISHA members have free access to the 2019 Buyers Guide online, a joint venture of the gear-review websites America's Best Bootfitters ([bootfitters.com](http://bootfitters.com)) and RealSkiers.com. Access to these reviews of the newest boots and skis normally costs \$10.

"The Masterfit Buyer's Guide has the most comprehensive, candid ski and boot reviews anywhere in the ski world," said publisher Steve Cohen, an ISHA corporate sponsor. "Our gear experts have also shared insider tips on selecting just the right bindings, poles, helmets, socks, boot bags and more."

"When you've got gear that works in concert with your body, you ski better and in greater comfort," said editorial director Jackson Hogen, a frequent contributor to *Skiing History*. The guide is published in digital magazine format. To read it, go to <https://masterfitmedia.com/19-buyers-guide> ❄️