

STYLE & FASHION

A Hop From the Barre to the Bar

As the line between high fashion and activewear blurs, there are more ways than ever to look good while exercising and beyond

BY ALEXA BRAZILIAN

WHEN CARA DELEVINGNE stepped onto the runway at Chanel's fall 2014 show last March, she looked as if she might be heading home from a Pilates session. The British model was dressed in a Pepto-pink, ab-baring top and matching leggings with bright running shoes and a tossed-on, elegant tweed coat as she strolled around a set made to look like a giant supermarket.

Some 70 looks followed—all variations on a sporty-stylish theme, all in the haute-banal environs of Chanel's mock Supermarché. A master of social commentary, Chanel creative director Karl Lagerfeld seemed to have dreamed up his own version of something that's happening right now on the streets and in actual grocery stores. To wit: a merger of two apparel categories—activewear and ready-to-wear—that have often intersected but have rarely been quite so interwoven.

Evidence of the phenomenon is everywhere you look. Nike Frees and Stan Smiths are the footwear of choice for women from London to Los Angeles, who pair sneakers as often with their Lululemons as with

'My friends who used to go have drinks now do Soul Cycle classes together.'

more refined pieces in their closets. Collaborations have popped up like beads of sweat in spin class: this spring, Nike teamed up with Givenchy's Riccardo Tisci, and Adidas has recently worked with everyone from London designer Mary Katrantzou to stylish pop stars Rita Ora and Pharrell Williams. Fashion-conscious British active brand Sweaty Betty is in expansion mode with a third U.S. shop in the works. And un-sporty brands, like Tory Burch, have active collections in the works.

One of the biggest developments is next week's debut of Net-A-Porter, a new destination on luxury e-commerce site Net-A-Porter that will focus exclusively on all things active. It will launch on July 9 with 16 brands—including traditional ones like Nike and a number of new names—outfitting women for 11 activities, including yoga, tennis, spinning and running. "We found that there was a bit of a gap in our offering for someone who loves fashion and exercise and wants to look great doing it," said Net-A-Porter President Alison Loehnis. "She shouldn't be in any way shortchanged when it comes to exercise and looking great."

Appropriately, the senior buyer charged with curating N-A-S's mix of merchandise, Candice Fraxis, is both a yoga enthusiast and devout fashionista. She's focused on finding fitness gear made for both sweating and socializing. Lucky for her, a crop of newish labels fit the bill—Laain, Weargrace, Monreal, Bodyism and Lucas Hugh, to name a few—all of which Ms. Fraxis snapped up. These brands use Italian fabrics, borrow in-

ion publicist Robyn Berkley, who sees traditional activewear as "outdated," created her label Live the Process, which launched in February at Barneys and will soon be sold on N-A-S. "It's more about lifestyle. Activewear is just part of the picture," she said. "My friends who used to go have drinks, now do Soul Cycle classes together instead. It's about what to wear during these social engagements." She describes her label as "Alaia for activewear," which translates to body-sculpting pieces in matte spandex like a color-blocked crop top with matching leggings or a dusty pink-and-floral leopard that could tuck nicely into a pair of faded jeans and hit the street.

If there's a through-line for this new active genre, it's that most brands are created by women with a professional background in fashion, who launched collections in response to a need in their own lives. Take Karen Joyce, founder of the serenely stylish yoga line Weargrace. Ms. Joyce, who worked first as an art director and later as an image director for Tom Ford at the Gucci Group for 15 years, began her label in 2012 after ditching corporate life to study yoga in India and Bali. "You don't have to look like a jock to practice yoga, but you also don't have to look like you're fresh off the plane from Goa wearing ethnic hippie gear," she said of Weargrace's ethos.

Tamara Rothstein and Sheila McKain-Waid, the co-creative directors of London-based label Laain (the name is a combination of both women's first, middle and last names), met while working in the design department of British brand, Dales. They refer to themselves as "mums on the run," and have made pieces like denim-style jersey bike shorts (a best-seller) and a sleeveless, double-faced wool hoodie that would layer nicely under a blazer to make their lives easier. "We built the line around our manic lifestyles," said Ms. McKain-Waid. "We do school drop-off, we do a yoga class, we go straight to a meeting." (The fact that both hold other jobs only makes things more manic: Ms. McKain-Waid is creative director for British heritage brand Jaeger and Ms. Rothstein still consults for major fashion brands.)

Pieces like Laain's hoodie fit into one of N-A-S's newly coined categories: après-sport. Those are the items you're not necessarily sweating in but that help your performance gear gracefully make the transition to the world beyond the exercise studio. Ms. Fraxis praised Laain, describing it as "if Jill Sander were to do activewear."

Also to be carried on N-A-S is Adidas by Stella McCartney, a decade-long partnership which is certainly the pioneer of this group. The collaboration is still going strong: Earlier this year, a free-standing Adidas by Stella McCartney store opened in Miami, joining a London outpost which opened in 2012.

Clearly, there's a need to be met. Then again, this trend isn't just about need, it's also about desire. As swimwear designer Lisa Marie Fernandez put it: "No one gets excited to go buy a pair of leggings. It's not like a new shoe." Ms. Fernandez hopes to change that with her col-



EVERYWHERE WOMAN With workout clothes like these, staying in your gear all day isn't a problem. Ballet Beautiful Belle Wrap Sweater, \$155; Laain Airtex Tank, \$155; Zimmermann Track Pant, \$308; all available at net-a-porter.com from July 9. Free 4.0 Flyknit Sneakers, \$120, nike.com.

Photo: Justin D'Amico/Photo: The Wall Street Journal. Styling by Paula Knight. Hair: A. Albano/Photo: Michael Madsen/Photo: Michael Madsen. Makeup: Amy Lemons/Photo: Michael Madsen.

Double Time: Gear That Works Out in the Gym and on the Street

