

# Globe Style

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Hemlines are yo-yoing up and down this spring. And we're not talking skirts

# Hot pants

BY TRALEE PEARCE

While we've all been busy being shocked and titillated by the dangerous dip of the waistband — so much skin, so many hip bones! — the real news has been unfolding at the other end of the pant leg.

Pant hems have been rising for the past couple of years, but the stakes just got a whole lot higher. It's an area full of insider codes. Hip-hoppers such as Missy Elliott have been yanking up one pant leg on their sweats for a few years in a self-styled wink to each other. And to make things more challenging, when fashion avant-gardists weren't wearing floods this winter, they were tucking their longer pants into high-heeled boots and managing not to look like Rhoda throwbacks.

So it's no wonder British Vogue recently trumpeted trouser length as fashion's true bellwether.

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Left: Just Cavalli satin bomber jacket, \$1,706, and denim pants, \$490; call 416-928-5004 for stores. Stuart Weitzman leopard-print shoes, \$298 at Browns, 1-800-520-SHOE.

Marc Jacobs denim jacket, \$495, and Jole pink satin cargo pants, \$295, at Holt Renfrew, 1-866-465-8736; Miu Miu top, \$415, Corbo Boutique, 416-928-0934; Les Tropeziennes wedge sandals, \$475 at Specchio in Toronto, 416-961-7989.



featured in article below

## Cropped pants are a more modest option to the bare-all mini

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"Forget skirt hemlines — it's trousers that have been yo-yoing up and down at breakneck speed these last few seasons," it read. "Cropped pants — this time falling somewhere around mid-calf — definitely look set to be hot for summer."

For women hesitant to embrace spring's miniskirt trend, foreshortened pants are a way to stay hip without baring too much skin. But for Los Angeles designer Joie Rucker, whose pink silk cropped Joie cargo pants (shown on the cover) are propelling her into the next anti-runway success story à la Juicy Couture, the motivation lies elsewhere.

"It's all about shoes," she says over the phone from L.A. "There are so many great styles out there."

Rucker favours raising the curtain on Manolo Blahniks with her floods (her term; she thinks capris are "dorky"), followed by ballet-inspired ankle-tied styles. Since shoe designs are a bit ahead of clothing, Rucker says she keeps an eye on the must-have shoes when she's designing the must-have pants.

Toronto designer Jennifer Dares says she was channelling a modern Mary Tyler Moore when she chopped her skinny winter pants to knicker length (shown above right) for her spring Layer collection. But her cotton-elastin short pants (in taupe or black) are nothing like the casual clam diggers of your youth. So put away those Converse.

Dares offers a matching fitted jacket that transforms the knickers into work-friendly attire with a dressy tank top and the right shoes.



Layer jacket/pants, \$895/\$360, 416-929-5150; Barbara Bui cami, \$150 at Corbo Studio, 416-966-8784; sandals, \$228 at B2, 1-800-520-SHOE. Bangles, Richard Wyman Design, from \$30, 416-777-9722.

"You can always think of knickers as an alternate to the knee-length skirt for work," Dares says. "And they look really sexy with a pair of heels for night."

Spring shoppers are already embracing the trend, from cheap chic Gap to Joie's \$295 range. "The silk version of our floods are off the charts. People have really responded," Rucker says. In addition to her shoe theory, she says women have been on the hunt for the ultimate version of the comfy cargo pant, without all that utility.

The pink cargos are utterly antithetical to the original combat-ready trouser. You don't wear this hiking in Nepal — it might snag. You don't store a Swiss Army knife in the pocket — it might bag. You do wear a sexy little top and high heels.

Oakville, Ont.-based image consultant Angèle Desgagné of Image-lite International says these nouveau rules of engagement with short pants shouldn't be intimidating.

"They are a great way to feel cooler in the summer. But you have to take your height and shape into account," Desgagné says. First, make sure the crop falls at the most flattering part of your leg — not at the widest part of your calf. Narrower styles are best for shorter women; taller women can carry off wider styles, such as the Seven jeans pictured here.

She says be careful with bulky cargos. "With all those pockets and details, by the time you put them on, they can add 50 pounds!"

Maybe that's why the Joie pant is flying off the shelves. Rendered in slinky silk, there's no bulk at all.

"We took something people wanted, the cargo pant, and played with fabric. Now, they're more fun," Rucker says.

The women who go for cool floods to showcase their spectacular shoes are being laid back, but glamorous, she says. "They want to be young and sexy but not be overt about it."



Marc Jacobs coat, \$695, top, \$250, and Seven jeans, \$210, at Holt Renfrew, 1-866-465-8736. Miu Miu pumps, \$425 at B2, 1-800-520-SHOE.

### Short, shorter, shortest

**Knickerbockers:** Full pants gathered below the knee. Originally worn by men in the 1700s, the item was adopted for sporting attire by women in the 1890s. In the '60s, they returned to vogue. Thank Yves Saint Laurent.

**Capris:** These were *the* style — slim, body-conscious and tapered to mid-calf — for those sunning on that Italian island in the '50s.

**Clamdiggers:** As the name implies, these are pants to wear in the sand when digging for clams. According to [www.yesterdayland.com](http://www.yesterdayland.com), the clamdigger was looser than the capri, and popularized in the 1960s. Think Gidget in her cute cut-offs.

**Culottes:** Now considered a divided skirt — even "skort" by modern parlance — culottes were originally French workmen's trousers. Then they became the gear of choice for cyclists. In the 1930s, styles became so full that the division was less obvious. In the hippie era, calf-length versions, called gauchos, were popularized.

**Pedal pushers:** These are shorter than capris and clamdiggers. As [www.yesterdayland.com](http://www.yesterdayland.com) puts it: "pedal pushers were high enough that the cuff wouldn't get caught in the chain of your Windstar cruiser."

— By Deborah Fulsang with notes from *The Encyclopaedia of Fashion* by Georgina O'Hara