



# Turn down that shirt

**Bold, bright and loud, Hawaiian shirts are an enduring product and a loud, sometimes deafening, fashion statement.**

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**A**loha is a word of greeting as well as the representation of pride and spirit in Hawaii. Aloha shirt is also the moniker for the Hawaiian islands' most distinctive fashion export and most-worn local garb.

In lush silk, breathable cotton, crinkly-comfortable rayon or skin-crawling polyester, the Hawaiian shirt has excited or seared eyeballs around the world for more than 60 years, never seeming to go out of fashion yet never quite being in fashion. Originally created for mass production in 1936 by shirtmaker Ellery Chun, who coined the term Aloha shirt, the shirts are a key part of Hawaiian clothing, which is the island's third largest export.

Chun took the Polynesian woodblock prints of native craftspeople, which were

usually crudely applied to pounded woodbark "tapa" cloth, and expanded the artform with exotic designs in wild colors. The shirt hit its first fashion peak when the Kamehameha company tooled up for mass production, at the same time that DuPont introduced a rayon fabric that held lurid colours much better than silk. Production of Hawaiian shirts stopped during World War Two, as factories were turned over to the war effort, and resumed in 1945.

Hawaiian fashion hit its stride in the 1950s, when sportswear became an acceptable part of the Hollywood look, surfers and tourists embraced Hawaiian shirts, and Hawaii became the 50th state of the United States. Hawaiian government

officials launched the annual Aloha Week, and started to encourage Aloha Fridays in the workplace, when even the most staid businessmen could wear their Hawaiian finery to the office. Also in the 1950s, Hawaiian prints started to be turned into day and evening wear for women.

Loose-fitting and designed to be worn untucked, Hawaiian shirts became a symbol of cool in the 1960s and 1970s, as people embraced their riotous colors and bold patterns. Another fabric innovation — polyester — solved the decay problem of rayon, cotton and silk, absorbed even louder dyes and made the shirts affordable for middle America. Hollywood glamorised the shirts in movies such as "South Pacific", "Blue Hawaii" and "From Here to





Eternity". Hawaiian shirts were an integral part of television programs such as "Hawaii Five-O" and "Magnum P.I.", plus the endless Hawaiian specials that cropped up in series such as "The Love Boat" and "The Brady Bunch".

Most people are familiar with the common elements in Hawaiian shirt designs, such as ukuleles, guitars, frangipani and orchids. Flowers are the most popular design, with exotic patterns incorporating birds of paradise, anthurium, hibiscus, ginger, jasmine and vines of floral leis, as well as plants such as poinciana, palm trees and even seaweed. Fruit is popular: bananas, pineapple, coconuts, mangoes, guava, starfruit, pomegranate and kiwifruit. If it is colorful, it has been

used on a Hawaiian shirt, from splashy sunsets and surfriders to grass shacks.

Although Hawaiian clothing is often hideous — look out for shirts featuring designs such as couples in matching cabana wear, vivid volcanic ties, racy hula-girl underwear and scenic singlets — it has become a collectable investment. Vintage Aloha shirts can sell for hundreds of dollars for polyester classics, and thousands of dollars for 1930s silk originals. No matter what the design, the color or the value of Hawaiian shirts, they have become a permanent part of international fashion. Why? Because there is always going to be people who want to be loud.

Phil Tripp owns 225 Hawaiian shirts.

