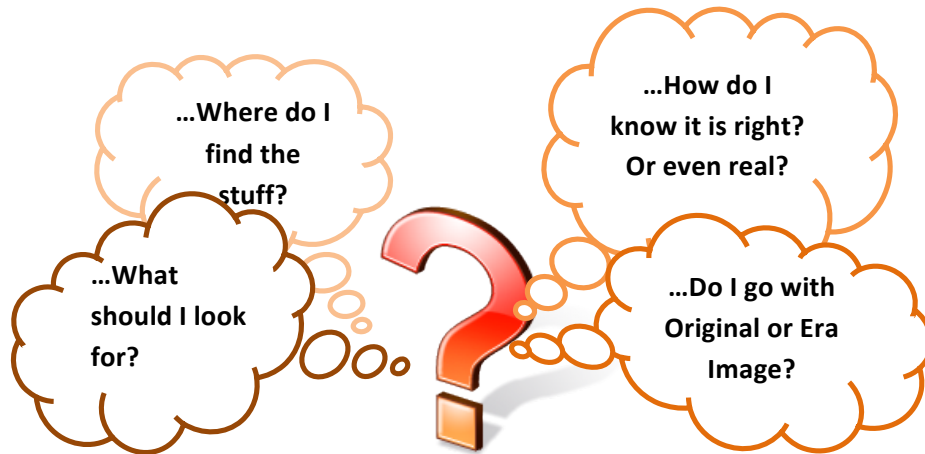


## Just Where Do You Start?

By Peggy Gill

You suddenly find you and your significant other immersed in this car hobby—he's up to his elbows in carburetors and crankshafts and the seemingly endless topics that the guys seem to be able to spend hours discussing. Local club meetings and outings are attended—you even buy a car! And then the tour leader mentions at a club meeting that for a particular event you need to be in era clothing. YIKES! The alarm bells start ringing...what *exactly* does that mean? Well, not so much *what*, but other questions begin to tumble out...



### **...Just where do you start?**

When I first asked this question a few short years ago, the immediate response was, "You need to get the *Fashion Guidelines*." It holds true, and it is still my most easily accessed reference source. The men and women who first developed this, as well as those who worked on the newer 2010 version (many of them one and the same) have literally hundreds of years of experience between them. A first perusal is fun as an introduction, flipping through page after page of fashions; but it can quickly become overwhelming as the styles blur. To help you in your quest to get started, perhaps the first order of business is to find your style preference with regards to the main garment.

To the new fashionista, the styles of the Model A Era are at first glance similar though all four years. This holds true, especially for the men's fashions which didn't change very much through the era. Women's fashions, however, appear similar in that they all exhibit pleats, flounces, similar neckline styles, and long sleeves in one shape or form. However, there are distinct differences for each year, and based on your body shape, one "year" may suit your needs better. A great place to start is by reading an article written by Fern Davis, in the column entitled "Fashionably Speaking", found on pages 42-43 in the February 2011 *Restorer*. Ms. Davis neatly encapsulates the differences by year and illustrates them with a number of pictures.

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After figuring out what year is right for “you,” you might want to return to the *MAFCA Fashion Guidelines* and immerse yourself in absorbing the nuances of your chosen year. This isn’t a quick perusal, but an in-depth study of the pictures and descriptions in an effort to engrain the details into your mental file.

In addition to pouring over the illustrations in the Fashion Guidelines, you’ll also want to access the link to Era Fashion Articles on the MAFCA website. This is a treasure trove of information, literally at your fingertips with the click of a mouse. You’ll find current articles written by Era Fashion Committee members past and present, as well as a link to archived articles, which is where I stumbled across another great article entitled *Training Your Eyes* written by Gail Doemland. In her article, she stresses the importance of training your eye so that when you go out shopping you will be able to recognize Model A Era style clothing. Not only does her article identify the basic characteristics of the main garment, but she discusses the basics of what to look for in outer garments, undergarments, hats, gloves, handbags, and jewelry. One big point she does make is that you need to decide if you are looking to have something fun to wear on tours, club events, or banquets, or whether you intend to enter fashion judging.

Now that you know what to look for, it is time to tackle where to find the perfect outfit. Regardless of whether you are just looking for fun fashions or are planning on entering fashion judging, your first stop should be your local club. Let others know what you are looking for—someone may have something just sitting on the closet shelf that they don’t need or use anymore.

If your goal is to create that era image, many people have had great luck shopping at discount stores such as Ross, Marshalls, or TJ Maxx for their main garment. Even thrift stores can often reveal hidden treasures for era image clothing if you are willing to spend time going through the racks. Many of the eighties-style dresses have an era look to them if you remove the shoulder pads and add a bow, scarf, or belt.

Looking for original garments? Be sure to attend your local MAFCA Regional meet. Oftentimes, they will have fashion boutiques available where MAFCA members can buy, sell, or trade fashion items they no longer need or fit into, and will often be very reasonably priced. You might also keep an eye open for Vintage Fashion Shows or Swap Meets in your area. Just be prepared to pay top dollar at these shows, and study up so you know what to look for. Another source to consider is an online website and that offers vintage clothing and accessories such as E-Bay or Etsy. Just remember that it is a buyer beware environment, and you are buying without getting a good close up look of the item.

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Finally, if you are a seamstress or know someone who is, another option for obtaining both fun to wear garments and for entering fashion judging is to make a reproduction garment. MAFCA has patterns available for purchase, many of which have been reviewed for authenticity and period correctness by past and present members of the Era Fashion Committee. Under the leadership of Helen Christensen and her team of dedicated helpers from the Santa Clara Valley Chapter of MAFCA, close to three hundred original patterns for men, women and children were digitized and made ready for printing. The pattern catalog can be viewed online at the MAFCA website or a hard copy may be purchased at the MAFCA Store. Follow the link under Fashions on the MAFCA website entitled “Pattern Project” for the history on the project and for more information and an order form. You will also find tips on working with era patterns, which is a must read if you decide to make your own because original era patterns are sized differently than modern ones and assume a certain level of sewing expertise in that *detailed* step-by-step instructions are often non-existent. Nevertheless, by making your own garment you can have a main garment that is easy to care for and perfect for car tours and outings, or depending on the fabric you choose, can be that perfect “reproduction” garment for fashion judging.

Many MAFCA fashion experts have differing views on whether to look for the main garment or the accessories and shoes first. There is no right answer, except that if you see something that works for you, go for it! This holds especially true for original era shoes due to that fact that many of the shoes found in wearable condition are in small sizes. Lucky for you if you wear a size 4 or 5! For “era look” shoes, a number of friends have had good luck at the dance wear clothing stores stating that they have found shoes there that have the right look and are very comfortable. Again, refer to the *Fashion Guidelines* so you know what to look for.

Perhaps the most fun to find and acquire are the accessories to go with your main garment. Antique stores and fairs are a fabulous source if you have the time and inclination to wander through by-gone eras for accessories such as jewelry, watches, gloves, flasks, and other novelty items, including furs which are a must for daytime outer garments.

Learning the ins and outs of Era Fashions is a daunting journey, especially if you are new to the hobby. However, you are not left adrift trying to recreate what most of us can only relive through pictures and catalogs. Undoubtedly, you have a wealth of knowledge available just from within your local club. Furthermore, MAFCA’s Era Fashion Committee has published multiple sources to peruse: the new *2010 Fashion Guidelines* and *A Book of Fashion Facts 1928-1931*, both of which are available through the MAFCA Store, links to fashion articles on MAFCA’s website, as well as past *Restorer* articles (if you can pry the magazine from your spouse’s hands). Remember, everyone in this hobby was at one time right where you are today. Model A enthusiasts are known across the country for sharing their knowledge—just ask!

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