

The Rhinestone Cowboy Rides Again

Nudie Cohn outfitted everyone from Elvis Presley to Dolly Parton as his business comes back and inspires the runway

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY JESSICA CHOU



DECADES HAVE passed since cowboys wore rhinestones — specifically, the bedazzled suits created by country and western tailor **Nudie Cohn**. The eponymous Nudie suit, born in Hollywood in the early 1950s, was worn by everyone from **Glen Campbell** and **Cher** to **Keith Richards** and **Robert Plant**.

Though Cohn's family closed its North Hollywood store in 1994, more than 30 years after he died, his influence resurfaced on the spring and pre-fall runways at Gucci, Valentino, Fausto Puglisi and in collections from fast-fashion retailers like Nasty Gal. For **Jamie Nudie**, 54, granddaughter of the designer who changed her last name to honor his legacy, the look's revival comes with the relaunch of the family's tailoring biz, which she runs with partner **Mary Lynn Cabrall**, 56.

The two recently outfitted the cast of the **Hank Williams** biopic *I Saw the Light* and dressed



Nudie suit inspiration showed up on the spring/summer 2016 runways of (from left) Gucci, Valentino and Fausto Puglisi.

Instagram-famous canine Doug the Pug for the American Country Music Awards. But the focus is on the custom orders, which start at \$795 and take four to six weeks to create. Nudie and Cabrall use a vintage Singer sewing machine and Cohn's original rhinestone setter to create western fringe shirts, guitar straps and, of course, the sparkly suits.

The story of these bespoke suits is detailed in *Nudie, the Rodeo Tailor: The Life and Times of the Original Rhinestone Cowboy*, the 2004 book about Cohn's life penned by Nudie and Cabrall. A Ukrainian immigrant who grew up in New York, Cohn

STARS WHO ROCKED THE NUDIE SUIT

Cohn started his business with a loan from Tex Williams, who auctioned off a horse to pay for the chain stitch sewing machine. The country-western musician was the first of many to wear the designer



◀ ELVIS, 1957

"Colonel Tom Parker came to my grandfather [left, with Presley] and said, 'I have this new kid. I want to do something spectacular that has never been done before,'" says **Jamie Nudie** of Elvis' gold lamé suit, which then cost \$10,000. It is now on display at Graceland.



◀ SONNY & CHER, 1966

"My grandfather knew Cher before she was Cher — he knew her mother, Jackie," says Nudie of the singer who, with then-husband **Sonny Bono**, put on Native American-inspired, suede-fringed Nudie suits.



◀ GRAM PARSONS, 1969

Already a Nudie devotee, Parsons had the rest of his **Flying Burrito Brothers** band outfitted in embellished suits for the cover of the group's 1969 debut album, *The Gilded Palace of Sin*.

▶ ELTON JOHN, 1972

John wore a custom rose-covered style with a star-embellished Nudie hat on the cover of his "Rocket Man" single.



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