

Mapping Fashion in the City by the Sea  
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Summary by Ashley Simmons

Prominent fashion cities, such as New York City, Paris, Milan, and London, have a major influence on fashion trends all over the world, and they are where design, production, retailing, and various fashion weeks take place; this provides a significant economic output to these cities. Dr. Linda Welters and a few graduate students developed a research project to see if Newport, RI measures up as a fashion city. Dr. Welters divulged the integral components of a fashion city along with Newport's background and current shopping districts to analyze Newport's role as a fashion destination.

Newport was one of five major American cities in the colonial period, and is a prominent tourist location today. During the colonial period, Newport was a summer colony for southerners, and currently has more colonial houses than any other American city. Newport was also known as a sailing capital and was a popular destination for summer weddings, including John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Bouvier's wedding in 1953. Today, tourists are drawn to this city due to its architectural history, sailing, yachting, restaurants, bars, and seasonal events. Tourism in Newport is a multibillion dollar industry that brings in revenue from accommodations, food, entertainment, and shopping.

Newport has multiple significant shopping districts that help make the case that Newport is indeed a fashion city. Each district has a distinctive theme that makes Newport a compelling shopping destination. Areas such as Brick Market and Upper Thames offer a myriad of chain stores in addition to small boutiques that are unique to Newport and have a strong following from locals and tourists. Bowen's and Bannister's Wharves have small-paned windows and antique lettering on shops to invoke a colonial feel, and island motifs to reflect the seaside.

David Gilbert identified the main ingredients of fashion cities in his 2006 book, *Fashion's World Cities*, and these components were analyzed in this research project to see if Newport meets the criteria. One aspect of a fashion city is that there is a core of creative designers, but Newport only has two fashion designers; jewelry designers are more prevalent. There must also be affordable rental space; however, one challenge for Newport is that rent is expensive in some districts, thus causing constant store openings and closings. There also are no strong fashion production networks and no citywide promotion of fashion through fashion shows. Even though Newport is missing some of the key elements of a fashion city, it still fulfills other important aspects. For example, Newport has a distinctive built environment offering seaside shops and old store fronts that all reflect a historical feel. Also, each district provides significant streets for shopping. There are many unique stores found only in Newport that encompass specific New England tastes and trends.

Newport is a popular tourist destination that offers colonial architectural history, sailing and yachting events, seafront restaurants and bars, and other seasonal events, such as summer weddings, all of which brings in an immense revenue to the city. The main districts in the city also provide an extensive shopping experience with a historical and seaside atmosphere and an offering of unique shops. Even though Newport has high rents, seasonal shoppers, little promotional activity, and not enough unique designers, this tourist destination still holds some of the essential attributes that comprise a fashion city.