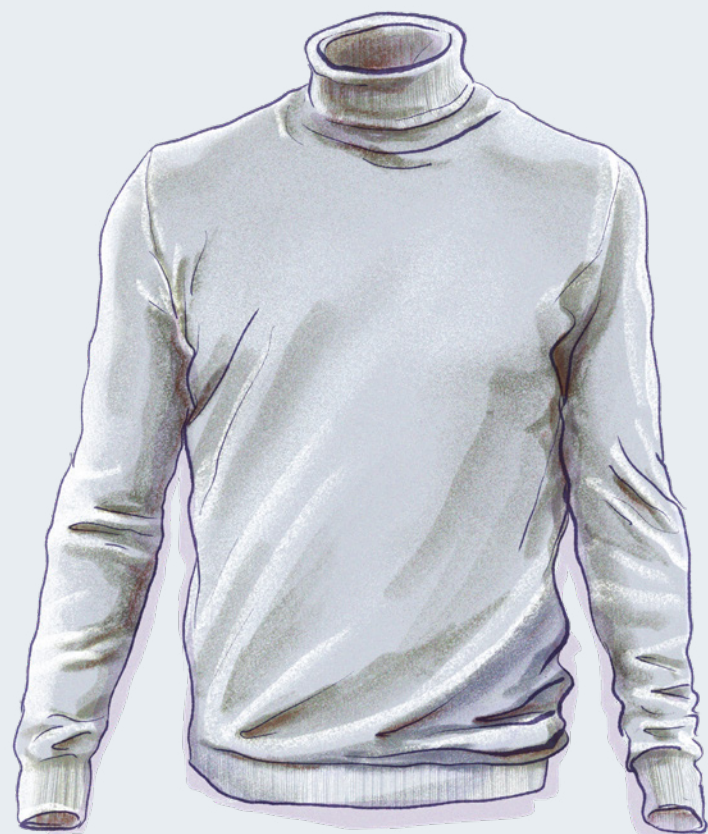


# The Turtleneck: 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea

An unflinching coastal classic that, even after five centuries, continues to take style by the throat.



As “The Star Spangled Banner” began to play in Mexico’s Estadio Olímpico, medalists Tommie Smith and John Carlos bowed their heads, each sprinter raising a gloved fist (Smith’s right, symbolizing Black power; Carlos’s left, symbolizing Black unity) for the duration of the anthem. The defiant gesture is still regarded as sports history’s most powerful show of activism, but neither the crowd nor the International Olympic Committee was pleased with the spectacle. Smith and Carlos were booed by some in the crowd and, bowing to pressure from the IOC, the American track team expelled them.

Arriving back in Los Angeles, Smith and Carlos were photographed crossing the tarmac. Both were wearing dark turtlenecks, but Smith’s outfit was particularly striking: in addition to a slim-fitting turtleneck, he wore a blazer, pressed khakis, loafers, beads around his neck, and a pair of sunglasses. It was the unofficial uniform of the Black Power movement, and the dark turtleneck was the linchpin of the outfit. It framed his face, drew the eye upwards.

Long before the turtleneck became a powerful symbol of radicalism, it was an old standby for fishermen, particularly in Guernsey, a small island in the English Channel, where the knitted sweaters continue to be made. The pattern is simple, allowing the sweater to be worn either backwards or forwards. Ganseys, as they came to be called, had a high neck, three-quarter length sleeves, and a diamond-shaped gusset in the armpit that allowed the arms to move freely in spite of the sweater’s tight fit. Finally, they were knit in the round (no side seams), with the sleeves being knit from the top to the bottom, which allowed knitters to unravel the sleeves and add in new wool for repairs when necessary.

Hand-knit Ganseys made of oiled wool were worn almost exclusively by coastal fishermen until the nineteenth century, when they started to appear in London. Soon, simple versions of the Gansey were being worn by laborers (particularly those, like barge-men, who worked on or near the water). Later, high-necked wool jerseys of a similar pattern



**Herbie Hancock in Amsterdam (1975):** Miles Davis once offered Hancock a ride home in his Maserati. Hancock declined, telling the trumpeter that he had his own car (an AC Cobra). The two lined up next to each other at the first set of lights. Hancock blew the doors off the Maserati, arriving at the next set of lights with enough time to light a cigarette.