

W09 Interview Preparation – Decade Designer

Which designer from *the 1920s* do you believe continues to have an influence on today's fashion? Why?

Jean René Lacoste is often forgotten in my opinion, but he had an important role in the radical fashion transition that occurred during the 1920s. The first fashions that come to mind are slinky flapper dresses, the glitz and glamor of the Great Gatsby, and mob bosses like Al Capone but it was so much more than that. It was a time of great change not unlike today. Today, we continue to benefit from the bold transformation Lacoste made in men's fashion along with other designers of his era. No longer were everyday fashions stuffy and formal.

Lacoste revolutionized the concept of sportswear and the polo shirt we know and that has become commonplace in our wardrobes today stems from his efforts. As a tennis star himself, it impacted the way he played. Early tennis attire was not practical by today's standards with its long-sleeved button-down shirts and neckties. Lacoste rebelled against the normal acceptance of playing



Figure 1 – Early Lacoste Polo against technical sketches of the design. Image borrowed from [Lacoste.com](https://www.lacoste.com)

in a dress shirt and tie. He designed his own short sleeved button-down shirt that featured knit fabrics, a collar, and only three buttons. The pique cotton he used was comfortable, breathable, and optimized range of movement on the court.

That shirt, the first of its kind, is what we have come to love about modern day polo shirts – comfortable, breathable, and movable. Today, however, they are available in a wider range of fabrics, textures, number of buttons, and colors. They are also available in a wide range of brands and fits including men, women, and children. One could say that this could make it even more comfortable than it was for our French tennis star of the 1920s.



Figure 2 – Current Ralph Lauren Polo Shirts inspired by Lacoste. Image borrowed from ralphlauren.com

It is also important to note that Lacoste had more than just fashion or style influence. The use of his alligator logo revolutionized the way branding happened on fashions from that day forward, on the outside of the clothing.