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## Arthur Cinader, Who Started J. Crew, Avatar of Preppy Style, Dies at 90

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Arthur Cinader, the founder of J. Crew, the clothing retailer that rose to prominence marketing a classic preppy chic to upper-middle-income consumers, died on Oct. 11 in Santa Fe, N.M. He was 90.

His family said the cause was complications of a fall.

Mr. Cinader (pronounced SIN-uh-der) decided to start J. Crew in the early 1980s while running the Popular Merchandise Company, a business, founded by his father in Rye, N.Y., that used a catalog to sell affordable clothing and home furnishings directly to consumers.

At the time, Mr. Cinader told The New York Times in 1990, he and his fellow executives at Popular Merchandise were closely following the success of other catalog businesses like Lands' End and L. L. Bean and believed they could capitalize on elegant but unpretentious women's clothing by creating a subsidiary company.

The new venture took the word "crew" from the water sport and affixed a J in front because it was thought to be graphically appealing. Its first catalog appeared in 1983.

Mr. Cinader empowered his daughter, Emily Scott, to conceive of the company's aesthetic and oversee the design of its apparel while he focused on the financial side of the business and on marketing through the J. Crew catalog, a skill he had honed running Popular Merchandise.

He would often write a kind of introduction to each catalog, setting the issue's theme. A favorite one, headlined "A Tradition of Artful Simplicity," ran in the spring 1989 catalog and epitomized the company's aspirational-Brahmin sensibility:

"For Kennebunk to Nantucket, Narragansett Bay to Amagansett, and points South and West, here's a J. Crew vision of sober but resonant color, rugged, sensuous fabric, and dedication to meaningful detail."

Mr. Cinader was known as an exacting manager who toiled over his copy and had little tolerance for imperfection. An industry consultant once recalled to The Times that Mr. Cinader had sent an underling's work back several times because the staples on the pages weren't straight.

In the late 1980s, after a run of what Mr. Cinader described as "explosive" growth, the company began opening its own retail stores, a sometimes treacherous transition that had been the undoing of other catalog businesses. J. Crew opened its first store at the South Street Seaport in Manhattan, followed by stores in San Francisco, Chestnut Hill, Mass., and other places.

The segue proved successful, and by the mid-'90s the company had several dozen stores collectively generating revenue in excess of \$500 per square foot, an enviable performance for a specialty apparel retailer at the time. Among its rivals, J. Crew was also relatively early in establishing an effective internet presence.

Mr. Cinader delighted in the company's ability to capture the popular imagination, as demonstrated by its occasional appearance in New Yorker cartoons. He particularly enjoyed one titled "The Love Song of J. Alfred Crew," Roz Chast's parody of a T. S. Eliot poem. ("I grow old ... I grow old ... I shall wear the bottoms of my relaxed-fit, button-fly, size-38, in Wheat, trousers rolled.")

In 1997, the Cinaders sold 88 percent of the company for roughly a half-billion dollars to the private equity firm Texas Pacific Group, which planned to scale up its modest retail presence. Mr. Cinader retired while Ms. Scott, his daughter, stayed on as chairwoman for several years.

Arnold Cohen, left, president of J. Crew, and Arthur Cinader, chairman, at the company's Lower Manhattan store in 1990. Credit: John Sotomayor/The New York Times

The success of the company owed much to Mr. Cinader and Ms. Scott's scrupulous focus on their target demographic: affluent, high-achieving people who wanted to signal a certain pedigree with their fashion choices, but not one so stuffy that they would think twice before associating with it.

Articles in the business press over the years have described J. Crew's niche as one notch below Ralph Lauren and one notch above retailers like Gap or the Limited.

While the company's first catalog featured photographs from the Weld Boathouse at Harvard, J. Crew marketed itself to the man or woman who might have attended any college or university and simply wanted to evoke a hint of the Ivy League.

The models in J. Crew catalogs "were definitely preppy," said Richard Jaffe, a longtime retail industry analyst who followed the company.

"These are people with perfect teeth, jumping into water, climbing off sailboats," he added. "It was a very aspirational lifestyle."

After its purchase, the company expanded rapidly and, with Ms. Scott sidelined, stumbled. Sales per square foot slumped, and the company churned through several chief executives.

Finally, in 2003, J. Crew hired Millard Drexler, who had helped chart Gap's success during the previous two decades, to lead it. Mr. Drexler bet on more expensive fabrics and gradually incorporated more inventive, high-fashion elements. The company rebounded and went public in 2006.

Still, J. Crew has struggled in recent years amid changing demographics and consumer tastes. While Michelle Obama's occasional appearances in J. Crew sweaters and skirts appeared to affirm the company's position as the de facto clothier of the middle-aged meritocracy, millennial consumers were seeking more distinctiveness in their attire.

"Instead of a wardrobe you wear to work, wear to play, wear to go out at night, the younger generation is able to deal with one wardrobe," Mr. Jaffe said. "The last thing you want to do if you buy one sweater this year is look like everyone else."

The company announced that J. Crew sales decreased by 7 percent to about \$443 million in the second quarter of this fiscal year. As of late August, it operated 274 J. Crew retail stores.

Arthur Cinader was born on Sept. 8, 1927, in New York City to Mitchell and Sarah Cinader. He attended the Bronx High School of Science before finishing high school in Arizona, where he had moved for health reasons.

He attended the University of Arizona and Yale Medical School but did not complete his studies at either school, dropping out of Yale to join his father's company.

Mr. Cinader is survived by Ms. Scott as well as by his wife, the former Johanna van Riel; three other daughters, Martha Mimms, Maud Bryt, and Abigail Olson; a son, Arthur Jr.; and 13 grandchildren.

Mr. Cinader spent much of his retirement in Santa Fe but also traveled frequently to the Netherlands, his wife's native country, and to New York and Washington, where he was involved with policy groups like the libertarian Cato Institute and the conservative American Enterprise Institute.