



THE LOOK

There's an old saying that appearances can be deceptive, and that was certainly true back in the early years of the biker bars. It was virtually impossible to tell the difference between straight and gay bikers, probably because they both had the same background coming out of World War II.

Most bikers in the 1950s were former GIs who, for various reasons, chose the open road instead of returning home to some Little Town, U.S.A., where they might not find acceptance for their new way of life, or sexuality.

Many gay bikers, like the men of The Squad, had discovered their "bent" while in the military. So it seemed only natural that they would pattern their new lives on that familiar discipline. They were accustomed to obeying orders and adhering to protocols of respect and behavior. Translating military protocols into a biker, or SM, life was an easy transition.

Back then there were no books, films, or magazines to advise them on the "correct" way to do things, so they simply adjusted what they knew into what they wanted. That might be a simple explanation for their frequent use of the term "sir," but that usage also existed in civilian life to acknowledge social status or earned respect.

With no established guidelines to follow, the men of that time improvised almost everything. With no leather shops to provide equipment, they searched places like war-surplus yards and saddle shops for items that could be adapted for their pleasures.

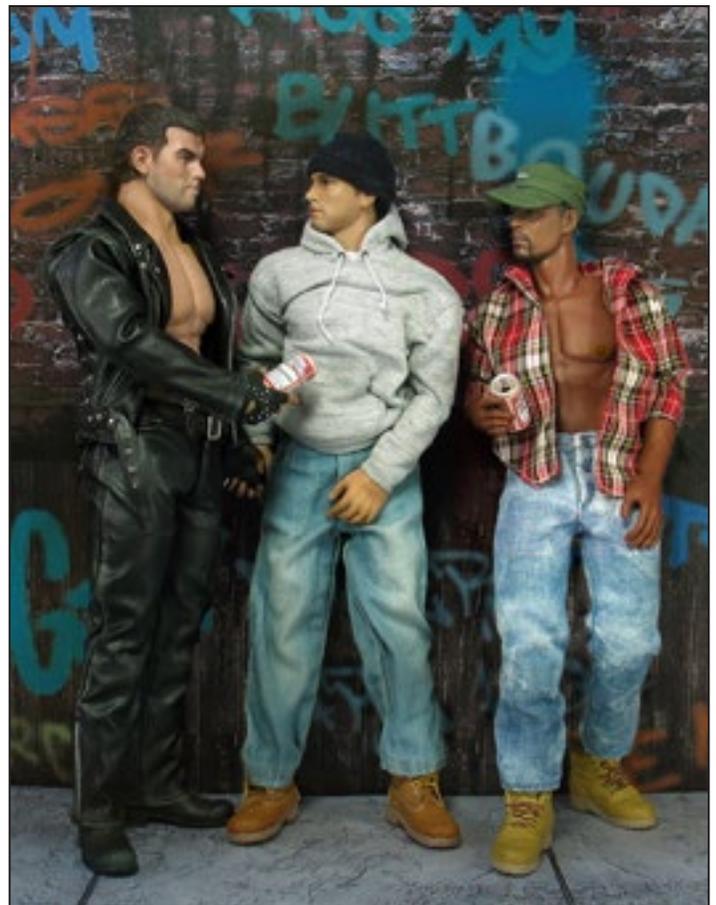
The only new leather clothing available in the U.S. back then were the basic BLMJ (black leather motorcycle jacket) and Western riding gear, including buckskin jackets and chaps. Both styles became iconic and fired many a sexual fantasy.



The 1950s bikers (left) dressed in jeans, T-shirts, and Army fatigues as well as their old bomber jackets. If a biker could afford a leather jacket it was usually the standard BLMJ, or black leather motorcycle jacket. There were no helmet laws back then, so bikers wore caps made of fabric or leather.

The 1970s leatherman (bottom left) had the advantage of being able to buy custom or off-the-rack leathers from the shops that could be found in most large cities. The leather shops also offered a wide range of accessories, including sex toys and kinky gear. This led old-timers to complain that fetish had become fashion and “S&M” now meant “Stand & Model.”

The 1990s leatherman (bottom right) was just as likely to cruise online as on weekends in the bar or the less frequent leather events. Many leather bars closed, while the ones that remained had less demanding dress codes, if any at all. The Internet doesn't have a dress code, and younger kinky guys don't need a full set of leathers to hook up for a hot night of SM exploration.



Leathermen in the 21st century have a vast array of clothing and gear to choose from. Fetish shops offer both custom and off-the-rack clothing in leather and rubber as well as hundreds of accessories and toys. Guys can pierce and tattoo their muscular bodies without fear of discrimination or censure. The 21st-century leatherman has come a long way from the bikers of the 1950s.







1950s



1960s



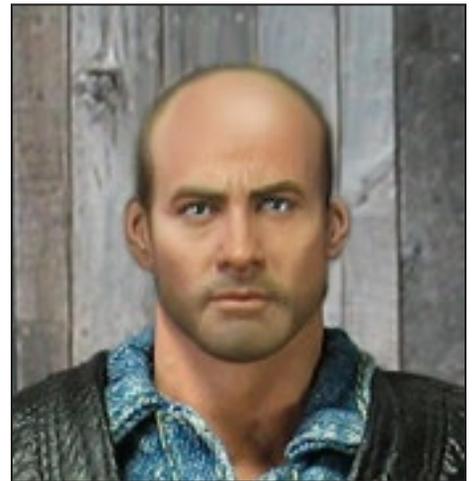
1970s



1980s



1990s



2000s

How his hair looks has always been an important part of a man's self-image. In the Bible Samson lost his strength and power when his hair was cut.

After the severe buzz cut, or crew cut, of the 1940s military, many returning GIs let their hair grow into a fashionable, longer style. In the early 1950s, almost every man was clean-shaven. For gay men, the icons of masculinity were found in the drawings by Tom of Finland and the popular Marlboro Man cigarette ads. The term "butch" was applied to anything masculine and would later be replaced by the term "macho."

The 1960s hair styles were heavily influenced by movie stars and rock musicians. A bushy moustache was part of the "clone look" that became so popular among gay men. Musicians continued to have a big influence on hair styles in the 1970s, and long hair, including ponytails, grew more and more common

because it seemed to express a spirit of freedom and rebellion. Although the Village People presented a parody of masculine icons, they were still wildly popular among gay men, including leathermen. The 1980s leatherman still favored a moustache but with shorter hair. A big influence here was Tom Selleck in the hit TV series *Magnum P.I.* The 1990s began the return to shorter hair styles, but the moustache and short trimmed beard remained popular.

In the 21st century, various lengths of beard stubble — what used to be called "5 o'clock shadow" — became the most popular look for male film and TV stars and the men inspired by them. And while in the past all men feared baldness, in the 2000s the bald or even shaved-head look gained popularity among confidently masculine men.

Long or short, a man's hair — whether on the head, chin, or elsewhere — has always been an expression of his masculinity.