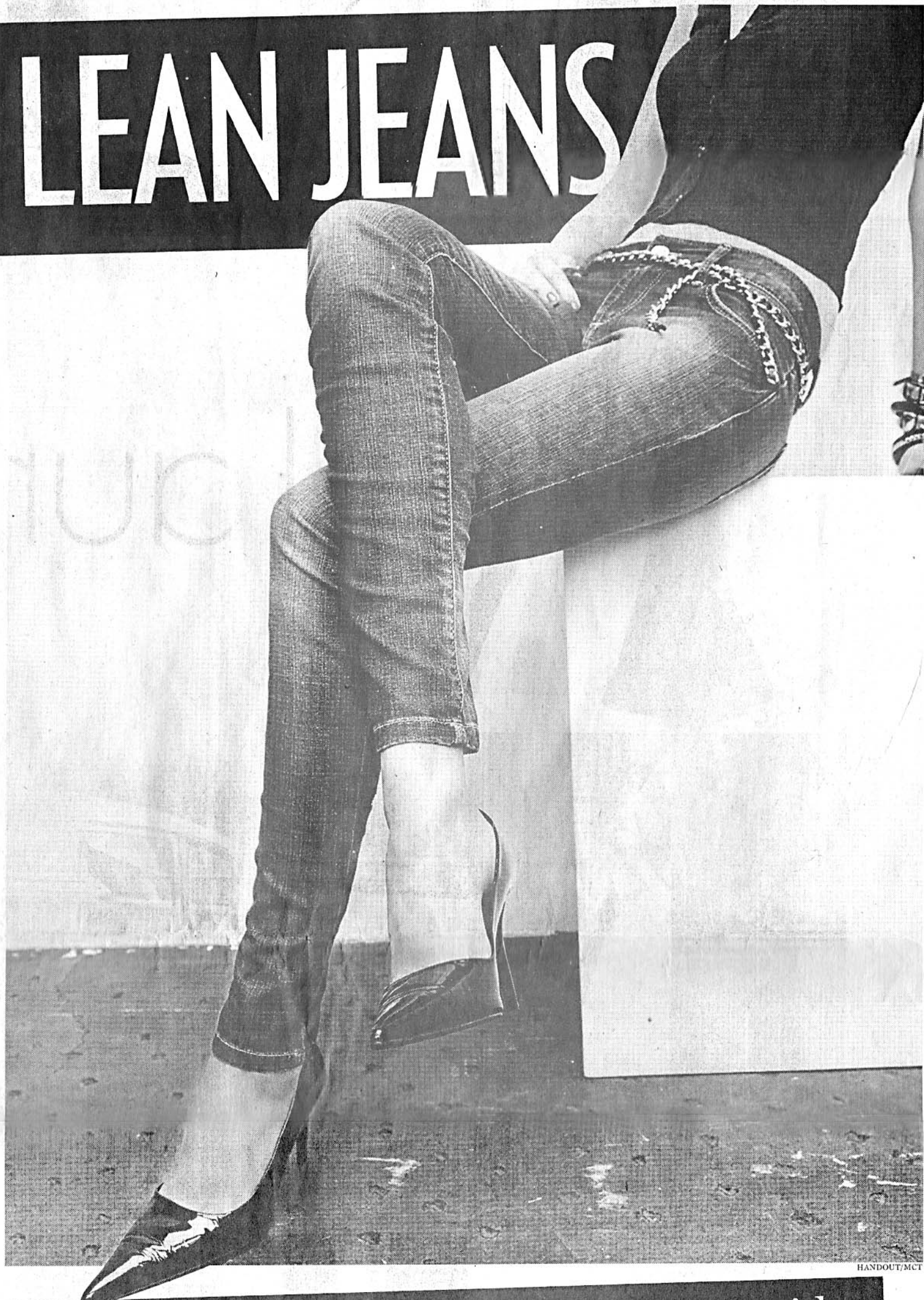


FALL FASHION

LEAN JEANS



HANDOUT/MCT

Skinny is all the rage, though not without its risks. Our fashion-forward duo square off

Unless you're rake thin, forget this trend

BY SYDNEY STOYAN



Call them what you will — stovepipes, matchsticks, skinny jeans. The name says it all: If you're in any way rounded, curvy or fleshy of flank, allow this fall 2006 trend to pass you by. Please.

All the major fashion magazines have recently run features telling us how to wear denim's newly unforgiving shape. And at first it seems a viable alternative to spring's directive: a jean folded artfully around the calf so as to be stuffed into a vertiginously high-heeled boot.

This precursor to the skinny jean was everywhere in early 2006 and it certainly separated the wheat from the chaff. It was one thing to see this look on the runway, worn by a leggy waif. It was quite another to see it trickle down to the mainstream (large thighs tightly encased in denim that stops at the knee? Not attractive).

So the fact that fall 2006 has bypassed the tuck-in for a fresher styling seems, at first glance, appealing. There are two radically

different footwear options for the skinny jean, offering the illusion of choice. Boyishly charming of figure? Go for a jean that stops at the ankle, say the mavens, and throw on a pair of adorable ballet flats. Want to elongate your leg and sex it up a little? Select a longer jean that bunches around the ankle and extend the line with the season's ubiquitous "shoob," the shoe-bootie that will, I promise you, make fashion victims of us all (but that's another story).

These same fashion guides even attempt to convince us that there is a skinny jean for every one of us, no matter our particular shape or size. Darker rinses, strategically placed pockets, a smidgen of extra room around the ankle — pshaw, I say. This is democracy at its most beguiling — and its most faux. It's all about the size of your thighs. Skinny jeans are for skinny people.

Many brands don't size higher than a 31 waistband (trust me, this is not as horribly large as it sounds. Go ahead, measure yourself). Promotional copy often shies from the '80s evocation of the word "tapered" (preferring to stress the jean's "straight-legged" look) but a tapered jean is exactly what you get if your hips are remotely larger than a child's and your legs are womanly. Did we

learn nothing from the balancing proportions of the boot-cut?

If you must wear a skinny jean — and you're not lean of leg — only the newly trendy tunic offers a shred of hope, gracefully enveloping the torso and falling somewhere over the derrière to the mid-thigh. Still, though. We're talking a lot of effort to get the look just right: The tunic must not be too baggy or too tight; it needs to hit at just the right part of the thigh; it requires a well-located belt to secure its volume — all this just to revisit a style that many of us wore years ago, when legs were slim and jeans were cheap and all that those 501 Red Tabs required was a quick trip to the local dry cleaners to peg them tight, the better to show off one's Bass Weejeun penny loafers.

However, when all is said and done, even I can admire the sprightly charm of the skinny jean, especially styled with a boxy little jacket and some pony skin flats. But it's a ruthless case of fashionista, know thyself: if you're over 20, or larger than a 6, update your denim with a more forgiving version thereof — perhaps a shapely, below-the-knee, sexy-sweet pencil skirt. Or cast a withering glance at passing trends and wear your classic boot-cuts with pride.

Weekend Post