

Time Travel



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FASHION FORWARD

A brief history of modern fashion

When sewing machines were invented in the mid-1700s, making clothes suddenly became much easier, and by the start of the 19th Century, people began to take note of the dress-designs they were seeing in the royal courts. By 1858, Charles Frederick Worth, had opened his own fashion house in Paris, a city which would soon become the fashion epicentre of the world. Worth's work became enormously sought after by the royal and imperial households of France, Spain, Portugal, Russia, Austria, Germany, Sweden, Italy, Japan and Russia. House of Worth still operates today, and continues to attract "royalty", clients in the form of 21st century A-listers, including the likes of Kylie Minogue, Kate Hudson, Lady Gaga and Kate Moss.

In the 1900s, Paul Poiret became known in America as "the King of Fashion," after a stint at House of Worth. He founded his own fashion house in 1903 and in 1911, established a perfume-and-cosmetics company, named Rosine, after his eldest daughter, as well as a decorative arts company named Martine, after his second daughter, thus becoming the first couturier to blend fashion with interior design. Along with a number of his contemporaries including, Lucile - aka Lady Duff Gordon - and Madeleine Vionnet, Poiret subverted fashion trends of the times, liberating the female body from the petticoat and the corset, which had been existence since Renaissance times. Steering away from the tailored couture of the 19th century, Poiret introduced clothing that hung from the shoulders, opening completely new possibilities in terms of draping the body. He drew from oriental fashion, as well as historical Greek and North African and Middle Eastern garments, using vivid colours, and new silhouettes, such as his "lampshade" tunic and his "harem" trousers, or pantaloons. Poiret was also one of the first designers to use costume jewellery in his collections, but it was Coco Chanel who was best known for this trend. In addition, Chanel accelerated the popularity of trousers for women and popularised designer perfume, lending her name to a range of coveted scents. Her greatest contribution, however, must be her iconic suits of the late 1950s and of course, the little black dress. Before Chanel introduced what has become the modern wardrobe staple, black was reserved for funerals and mourning.

In the late 1920s, the flapper style emerged, with women wearing short sleek hair and shorter than average shapeless shift dresses. Until this point, high fashion had been for the rich, but the flapper shift dresses were simpler to sew at home and flourished among the middle classes.

With shorter hemlines, shoes also became more noticeable and more of a fashion statement. By the 1940s, World War II brought about utilitarian fashion, thanks to rationing, and styles tended to mimic military uniforms. Fashion items included sensible wedge shoes, the turban (or bandana), and sensible suit.

In contrast, the 1950s gave birth to consumer culture and teenagers as an emerging fashion voice. In 1947, Christian Dior was responsible for a turning point in fashion history when he introduced a look with a fitted jacket and nipped waist. In a complete turnaround from the austerity of





war times, Dior's abundant use of fabric was a shock. With his Corolle line, he presented feminine designs that women loved, and his designs dominated the fashion scene for the next decade. Femininity reigned supreme, as evidenced in the ever popular outfits created for Marilyn Monroe by William Travilla, including that famous white dress she wore over a heating grate in the 1955 movie *The Seven Year Itch*. At around the same time, in 1956, the House of Hermes designed an iconic handbag, named after actress Grace Kelly, which revolutionised the handbag industry. The Hermes "Kelly Bag" still remains one of the most coveted bags on the market. The 1960s are best known for miniskirts, although they were only popularised in 1966 and 1967 by Mary Quant. John Bates is thought to have been influential in the rise of the mini. In 1959, he had established the Jean Varon label, and later started a label under his own name. He dressed Diana Rigg in *The Avengers* series, and was popular with Twiggy, Sandie Shaw, Jean Shrimpton and Dusty Springfield. Of course, we can't skip past the 1960s without mentioning Jackie Kennedy and her original style inspiration, Audrey Hepburn. The little black dress worn by Hepburn

in the 1961 film *Breakfast at Tiffany's* designed by Givenchy, has become one of this century's most iconic pieces. The sleeveless, floor-length silk black gown had a cut-out décolleté and a slit on one side, and sold for €692.390 at auction in 2006. Jackie Kennedy, affectionately known as Jackie O, incorporated Hepburn's Hollywood style into her wardrobe and developed her own signature looks, which influenced women's fashion throughout her life. Givenchy and Oleg Cassini, a Hollywood costumer, were her designers of choice, although she also wore Chanel jackets and A-line skirts by Dior. She loved her pillbox hats, long white gloves, pearls and brooches. The next "first lady" of sorts to inspire women's fashion to the same extent was probably Princess Diana. From her 1981 ivory silk taffeta wedding dress designed by David and Elizabeth Emanuel with its 25-foot train, to the infamous "revenge dress" by Christina Stambolian, which she wore in 1994 to the Serpentine Gallery summer party on the same day Prince Charles confessed to having an affair with Camilla Parker Bowles, Princess Diana used fashion to express herself and even achieve specific reactions from the world that was watching.

Today, Kate Middleton follows in the footsteps of the mother in law she never met. The Duchess of Cambridge's wedding dress was designed by Alexander McQueen, and she is often snapped wearing designs by the label, as well as British designer Jenny Packham. Despite her penchant for high-end fashion, however, she also enjoys high street brands, and has boosted the sales of brands like Zara, Reiss, Whistles and LK Bennett.

Across the ocean, Michelle Obama is doing much the same, mixing high street brands like Gap and J Crew with designer labels like Narciso Rodriguez and Marc Jacobs. ■ Tamara Oberholster



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