

1920s to the present

developments of the period.

Change in silhouette, construction and detail reflect

shifting notions of beauty, taste and femininity

along with economic, political and technological



Austere times ... technical innovations and Hollywood escapism

Where's the man could ease a heart Like a satin gown

DOROTHY PARKER 'THE SATIN DRESS' 1937

In the wake of the Wall Street crash in 1929 fashion abandoned the linear shift style of dress to one that followed the lines of the body. Bodices were slightly bloused, belts emphasized a waistline reinstated to its natural position and, for eveningwear, skirts fell to the floor and were gently flared. Shiny, fluid fabrics suitable for draping and pleating were favoured. Backless evening gowns made their debut in the 1930s.

Dressmaking techniques developed by Parisian couturiers, such as cutting fabric on the cross or bias, created streamlined evening gowns that clung to the body. These innovations were widely copied and popularised by glamorous Hollywood actors at a time when the film industry represented a thrilling sense of escapism.

Popular fashions for evening included neoclassical gowns by Madeleine Vionnet (1876–1975) and Madame Alix Grès (1903–1994). An alternative evening style was a romantic gown with wide skirts and puffed sleeves as popularized by the 1933 film Letty Lynton.

BELOW: Australian c 1935



Feminine ideals ... couture and conformity

Wearing a beautiful gown you become a real woman...

CHRISTIAN DIOR 'THE LITTLE DICTIONARY OF FASHION' 1954

Christian Dior's 'New Look' - with a rounded shoulder line, a nipped waist, and either a very full skirt or pencil slim - defined the look of the 1950s. The New Look's feminine aesthetic was heightened in glamorous eveningwear.

The 1950s was an era when the rules for appropriate dressing were taken seriously. Cocktail parties, dinner engagements, theatre attendance and balls had their distinct fashion requirements. Opulent embellished strapless gowns with full-length skirts were popular for balls but were considered too formal for other evening occasions. For the newly popular cocktail party, an elaborate New Look dress in a plain luxurious fabric, such as silk taffeta or velvet was worn with matching gloves and hat.

The designs of leading Paris couturiers – Christian Dior, Cristóbal Balenciaga, Jacques Fath, Pierre Balmain and Hubert de Givenchy - were all closely followed and copied. By the end of the decade, influences from a younger generation saw a decline in the influence of Paris couture and New Look fashion was replaced by a youth-driven shift dress.

BELOW: American c 1957

Modernising dress ... the Jazz age and flapper style

She wore her evening dress, all her dresses, like sports clothes ...

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD 'THE GREAT GATSBY' 1925

Women's fashion was dramatically modernised after World War I. The trailing skirts and restrictive clothing of past eras were considered unsuitable for the more active and emancipated lives women were starting to live. A new style of dress, tubular in shape and falling straight from the shoulders to just below the knee, became fashionable.

For eveningwear, dazzling surface decorations – beads, sequins, flounces and loose panels – suited the decade's exuberant nightlife with its high energy dance crazes like the foxtrot and charleston. Geometric and abstract patterns in applied decoration and dress fabrics reflected the visual qualities of the Art Deco art movement.

French couturier Coco Chanel (1883-1971) popularised a black shift dress that was celebrated for its sophisticated urban chic and versatility. The 'little black dress' (LBD) became a staple of 20th century eveningwear.

ABOVE: German c 1927



Fashion during the war ... post-war, Dior and the

After the war ... I designed clothes for flower-like women

CHRISTIAN DIOR 'DIOR BY DIOR' 1957

During World War II (1939–45) women's fashions were characterised by knee-length narrow skirts and square shoulders that echoed the silhouettes of military uniforms. Many countries adopted a rationing system to curb waste and limit the amount of fabric used in a garment. Women were encouraged to make do and mend.

Two years after the war ended Christian Dior (1905–1957) launched his couture house in Paris with a collection that became a fashion sensation. Dubbed the New Look by the media, Dior's collection was characterised by dresses with a rounded shoulder line, a cinched waist and tight bodice, and a very full skirt to the calf. The hips were padded out and extra petticoats emphasized an hourglass silhouette. The New Look clothes were made with plenty of luxurious fabrics. After the austere fashions worn during World War II, the femininity and romance of the New Look was considered particularly alluring.

ABOVE: Dior France c 1948







Anything goes ... anti-fashion, modernism and disco glam

The evening is the time for folklore YVES SAINT LAURENT 1972

Eveningwear was casual and varied during the 1970s. At the beginning of the decade the counter-culture movement and dress worn by hippies was influential as designers appropriated the stylistic trends conveyed in the hippie movement's interest in other cultures, individuality and experimentation. Retro fashions – especially Edwardian and 1930s styles – and ethnic influences were seen in the fashion for long printed dresses and the kaftan, the traditional dress of Northern Africa. Influential Paris couturier Yves Saint Laurent (1936–2008) designed opulent evening gowns inspired by folk costume.

From mid decade a new modernism came into fashion. The streamlined pared back styles of American ready-to-wear designer Roy Halston (1932–1990) were benchmarks of 1970s glamour and were favoured by the fashionable clientele of New York's disco scene. Clothes for dancing in discos were made of shiny, metallic and glittery fabric as seen in the 1977 film Saturday Night Fever.

BELOW: Ninette Creations, Australia c 1970



Fin de siècle ... postmodern glamour

It's all about the individual and personal style, wearing high-end, low-end, classic labels, and up-and-coming designers all together ALEXANDER McQUEEN 1990s

In the early 1990s fashion become fragmentary and dissolved into numerous and various styles for different 'style tribes'. Influences on fashion were disparate and designers were inspired by a myriad of sources: the street styles worn by young people to express their identity; fetish wear and the use of underwear as outerwear; ethnic dress; technological textiles; and the trend for dressing down that tends to occur with global recession.

The styles worn in previous eras were a major influence on fashion with designers referencing the past in construction, silhouettes and detailing of their garments. The popularity of vintage fashion – high end second hand clothing from previous eras – emerged in the mid 1990s and continues to endure as women appreciate the pleasure of wearing a quality one off or limited dress.

BELOW: Galliano for House of Dior, French 2010



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Optimism and youth ... futuristic themes and the mini

I had always wanted young people to have a

MARY QUANT 'QUANT ON QUANT' 1966

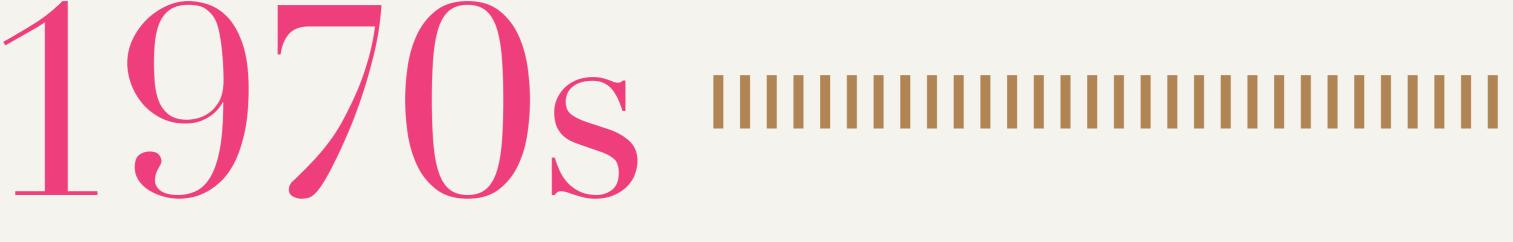
fashion of their own

A new generation of designers created clothes that were casual, youthful and fun. Futuristic themes, triggered by the interest in space exploration, new materials, and vibrant colours and patterns are characteristics of eveningwear in the 1960s.

Mini-skirted straight dresses were made from metallic fabrics or brilliantly patterned fabrics, and surfaces were trimmed with sequins, beads or plastic bits. Evening dress could also be long and ensembles with coordinating tops such as those created by the Italian designer Emilio Pucci (1914–1992) were popular. The influence of feminism was seen in the acceptance of the pantsuit for eveningwear at the end of the decade.

Influential designers Mary Quant (b 1934) in London and André Courrèges (b 1923) in Paris are both credited with introducing the mini dress, a shift dress that defined the look of the decade and reached its shortest length between 1966 and 68.

ABOVE: Mary Quant, British 1961-63







Power dressing ... must-have labels, glitz and excess

If you can't be elegant at least be extravagant FRANCO MOSCHINO 1980s

The 1980s has been characterised as a decade of money making and conspicuous consumption. Fashion saw a shift towards more ostentatious clothes. "Power dressing" was an expression used to describe the big-shouldered, skirted suits worn by women to the office and the extravagant statement-making gowns worn in the evening. Evening dress integrated plenty of frills, puffs, glitter and excess. It was a look popularised by American television shows such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, which were watched by millions.

Interest in fashion focussed increasingly on high fashion and designers. Many of the designers that emerged during the 1980s remain influential today, for example Thierry Mugler, Azzedine Alaia, the house of Versace, Giorgio Armani and Jean-Paul Gaultier. British fashion was promoted by Princess Diana, a fashion icon during the decade.

ABOVE: Christopher Essex, Australian c 1985

New generation ... red carpet appeal

I always love designing gowns

MICHELLE JANK 2013

Nowadays, women's eveningwear can vary dramatically: from jeans worn with high heels and an opulent top, or a demure little black dress, to a show-stopping gown in the grand style of the 1950s.

Despite the increasing trend towards casual dress, it would seem that women still like to 'dress up' and are prepared to splash out on a dress that they may only wear a few times. In the last 10 years red-carpet events featuring celebrities have become a major showcase for fashion designers and determine how and what they design. This has filtered through to fashion retailers who provide 'occasion wear' for events ranging from high school dances, ladies days at races, and charity events.

ABOVE: Michelle Jank, Australian 2008