



Fifty Dresses That Changed the World

Design Museum , Michael Czerwinski

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You don't have to be a fashionista or a design aficionado to adore this fascinating look at the power of one dress to change society.

Join the Design Museum, the world's leading museum in contemporary design, on a guided tour of the 50 most important dresses in social history and design.

Filled with pages of beautiful clothes, and the famous faces (and bodies) that put them on the world stage - including Wallis Simpson, Jackie Kennedy, Twiggy and Cher and, of course, Princess Di-this fun volume shares fascinating appraisals of what gave the 50 most important garments their iconic status.

Fifty Dresses That Changed the World Details

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From Reader Review Fifty Dresses That Changed the World for online ebook

Heather says

This was fun for me. I'm hardly a fashionista, but I like to feel pretty, and therefore I kinda like clothes! And what I really like in a dress is a vintage vibe (think 40's, 50's and 60's). I enjoyed reading about each of the fifty dresses that were chosen, and some of them I would absolutely wear now!

Laura says

I agree that this book is lacking in many respects cited by other reviewers: the typos, the fact that it deals with dresses only within a limited historical timespan (it should have had a disclaimer); and the sin of omission in not featuring an image or mention of J. Lo in the Bamboo Dress, when it was she who made it famous in the public eye in the first place. But nevertheless, I learned a lot from this book when I wasn't expecting it: among the little facts I picked up was that the "Bandage Dress" which became a mark of boldness and modern style in our time was devised as a means of using waste strips of fabric left from the mass production of other garments. I wonder how many other stories behind well-known fashion trends there are that the public hasn't had an opportunity to learn?

Samantha Penrose says

Each of the fifty dresses gets a two page spread; a photograph on one page, a blurb on the other. The descriptions discuss the impact that the design had upon both the world of fashion and the designer's career. In some cases, the author attempts to reveal the inspiration for the dress, which I found rather interesting. The dresses are presented in chronological order, beginning in 1915 and ending in 2007. Common themes include: following traditional roles, breaking tradition, the use of innovative materials, practicality, and of course, the wow factor.

My faves? The Chanel suit, the wrap dress, the ghost dress, and the tea dress.

ModCloth says

When I was ten years-old, among my favorite outfits was a long, maroon dress embellished with tiny, floral bouquets, and an oversized, lace collar. This, ladies and gentlemen, was not a dress that changed the world.

With a better eye than my young self, London's Design Museum undertook the ambitious task of naming the Fifty Dresses That Changed the World. The result, a collection of brief histories and full-page photographs, lays out the dresses and designers that revolutionized fashion these past one hundred years. Beginning with Mariano Fortuny's 1915 flowing Delphos Pleated Dress, the book attempts to lay out the importance of what we wear as women, and how these chosen dresses reflected, and in some cases, initiated social and cultural changes. Blending the wacky (the 'Buried Dress', which was left to decompose in the designer's garden),

with the classic (everyone's favorite 'Little Black Dress'), Fifty Dresses provides a fairly comprehensive timeline of women's wear, while reflecting on the social, technological, and historical movements that got us where we are in fashion today.

Read more about Fifty Dresses That Changed the World after the jump.

While most dresses included in the book are notable fashion contributions, you can't help but wonder as a reader if the book's title is a tad too grand. Were these fashion statements changing the world, or merely reflecting the brewing movements of their decades? At times, the author doesn't go as deep as he could into his explanation of how these dresses' contributed to the world fashion scene, making the overall tone of the book somewhat uneven. Each dress' history is told in an incredibly straight-forward manner and lacks the flair that each fantastic design deserve. You can't help but wish for a more narrative touch when dealing with characters like Coco Chanel, Audrey Hepburn, and Cher. The age-old adage might say that the woman makes the dress, but you lose that intimacy in the book's pages. Despite its flaws, Fifty Dresses is educational (Have you heard of the topless dress? I certainly hadn't.), and will make a lovely, little addition to any fashionista's coffee table. It also provides a handy overview to a younger generation who may not know the origin of their favorite wrap dress (Thank you, Ms. von Furstenberg).

The tried and true designs of the earlier part of the twentieth century certainly have cemented themselves in fashion history, but those mentioned later in the book, still may have something to prove. It is difficult to tell the staying power of the more current trends – will they remember balloon and galaxy dresses when the next volume of 'Dresses that Changed the World' comes out in one hundred years? Fifty Dresses wraps up with Hussein Chalayan's 2007 LED dress, a vibrant, glowing manifestation made of Swarovski crystals and over 15,000 LEDs. With 2010 rapidly approaching, you can't help but wonder what fashion has in store for us tomorrow. I only hope they go easy on the lace collar.

Kris Grooms says

A good way to get an overview of the most important designers of the last hundred years. Every major couturier was hit, and a few I'd never heard of. The photographs are clear and beautiful. One problem I did have was that the photographs weren't always what I was expecting. For instance, Donatella Versace's bamboo-print silk dress was shown on the runway, not worn by J. Lo, who made it famous. There was no mention of her, or of Matt Lauer's hysterical take on it.

The book focuses on the sublime, the avant-garde, the statement pieces. If you need to know the basics of the LBD or the Chanel suit, this is a great quick-learn review.

Ubalstech says

Great book that presents, as the title says, the dresses whose impact was so great that they changed fashion. The formula is simple, each dress is presented in a full page photograph. On the facing page is a short essay on the history of the dress, construction techniques and why it was so revolutionary. There is also usually a smaller picture of the dress right beside the text.

The only issue I had with this book was that they frequently used a modern "re-interpretation" of the dress

for the large picture. I would have preferred this be a picture of the dress when it was first introduced. Still, this is a wonderful short history of western fashion for the armchair fashionista.

Brooke says

I would have liked this book more if it had included dresses before 1915 -- I didn't agree that some of the selections in the book were more influential than earlier styles, such as the floating and sheer Empire-style gown, or the bustle and princess dresses from the Victorian age, etc. Otherwise, a good survey of 20th century dress fashion.

Sarah says

Really problematic and vapid. Start with the lack of any dress before 1909, and go from there...

Laura says

The main idea of the book is to explain -in a really fast-reading and easy way- about the story of the dresses and what changed because of it. I liked it.

A ideia principal do livro é explicar -em uma leitura rápida e de um modo fácil- a história dos vestidos e o que mudou por conta disso. Eu gostei

Rita says

Fascinating list of dresses, lovely photos, clean design, and great for a quick bus-ride read. Disappointed with the numerous mistakes - Rita Hayward instead of Rita Hayworth; it's instead of its, etc.

Kim Olson says

This little book, which profiles 50 iconic dresses of the last century (with photos), is such a fun romp! Scanning the decades, the Design Museum celebrates the influential (from the flapper dress to Mary Quant's minidress), statement pieces (the Mondrian dress), and those innovative concoctions that were never destined to make it too much further than the runway (the topless dress). Nice little write-ups for each, offering a glimpse into why each dress broke from the pack and made design history.

Mary Karpel-Jergic says

It's difficult to snap shot 50 dresses that changed the world. It's somewhat subjective and it's going to miss some but this book is a fun romp through a comprehensive selection and shows how fashion is influenced by

the era it is in, art and technology. A picture and an informative bit of blurb is just enough to keep you hooked. It's a quick read but one to come back to.

Included in this book is the Queen's coronation dress which I actually went to see at Buckingham Palace where it was on exhibition this summer. Such a shame that the silk is no longer white. Nevertheless, an AMAZINGLY beautiful dress that showcases superb craft skills as well as impeccable design by Norman Hartnell. In fact, never explicitly mentioned or named - it's the tailors and seamstresses who bring these design visions into creation.

Mary Helene says

It was delightful. Nearly every dress I could say - Yes! I know that dress. Now explain it to me. I thought the authors did a moderately good job of that.

Louis says

This is a very short book, obviously designed for an exhibition. However, it makes up in historical scope what it has in brevity.

Each dress is represented by two pages. The first page is text with a small inset photo. The facing page is a larger photo of the dress in question.

Coincidentally I had just finished viewing the DVD "Coco before Chanel" prior to reading this book.

Of course the Audrey Hepburn and Princess Diana references are here, although both well-justified as they were fashion icons in their prime (forget dowdy early Diana). And the whole array of sixties fashion trends are here. But there also are some interesting other pieces with which I was less familiar.

Needless to say, this work is not comprehensive. But as a fun, short read, it is delightful.

Moorhead Public Library says

This book describes the unique, the influential, and the must have dresses of the 20th and 21st centuries. From the Jersey flapper dress and the Little black dress to Princess Diana's wedding dress and the One-shoulder dress, this book delves into the path fashion has taken throughout the years with wonderful visuals.
