

Robert Leach



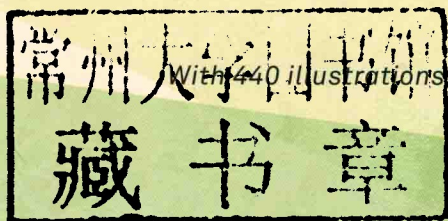
THE
FASHION
RESOURCE BOOK
Research for design

Thames & Hudson

Robert Leach

THE FASHION RESOURCE BOOK

RESEARCH FOR DESIGN



With 40 illustrations, 333 in colour



Thames & Hudson

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To Sue McCarthy

Pages 1 & 2 Basso & Brooke Japanese-inspired 'Hi-Tech Romance' collection, Spring/Summer 2009.

First published in the United Kingdom in 2012 by Thames & Hudson Ltd, 181A High Holborn, London WC1V 7QX

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Designed by Karolina Prymaka
Edited by Kirsty Seymour-Ure

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-500-29035-4

Printed and bound in China by Toppan Leefung Printing Limited

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FOREWORD

This invaluable book interrogates the notion of research: what it is and how to do it, what it does and why. It directs the reader to a greater understanding of why primary research is fundamental in developing a personal identity as a fashion designer within a global industry.

I have known Robert for more than sixteen years, first as a student, then as an independent designer and later as a fellow educator at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London. Our relationship as a teaching team focused specifically on working with students and their research to encourage them to pursue their own investigative design process enabling them to articulate their own creative voice. Robert's extensive knowledge of clothing history, details and cut is unparalleled and is evidenced through his hands-on study of fashion practice, as both a trained designer and an innovative pattern cutter.

One key collaboration was an annual tailoring project held at Central Saint Martins for second-year students. Its basis was to assist students in understanding the expansive possibilities of what tailoring could be, and it was underpinned by a 'creative briefing' process and supported by Robert's vast knowledge of the subject. Its resulting success was the binding of the design process and the construction research process of the garment, and the understanding that the two methods are inseparable.

Below Porters carrying trunks on their backs in the traditional manner, in early 20th-century La Paz, Bolivia. Photograph by Frank G. Carpenter.

Opposite The John Galliano Autumn/Winter 2004 collection, featuring luggage carried in a similar manner.



What sets this book apart is the breathtaking knowledge conveyed through the personal insights of the professionals involved. The eclectic mix of visuals with supporting interviews by real design professionals from within education and industry serves to provide a consistent message – that of ‘the personal’.

The interviews uncover some of the often veiled or presumptive ideas of the way in which research occurs. This process can come only from those who do it and who know it instinctively. Reading through these illuminating case studies we see articulated the continual need for primary research, as evidenced by the traceable threads of the personal design identities involved.

As a self-employed fashion designer working within my own business structure and crafting my own vision throughout, I feel it important to note that my work was always grounded in a strong and substantive research base. I have always believed in the pursuit of innovative methods of fabric development for structuring a personal design identity from within what is a very congested industry.

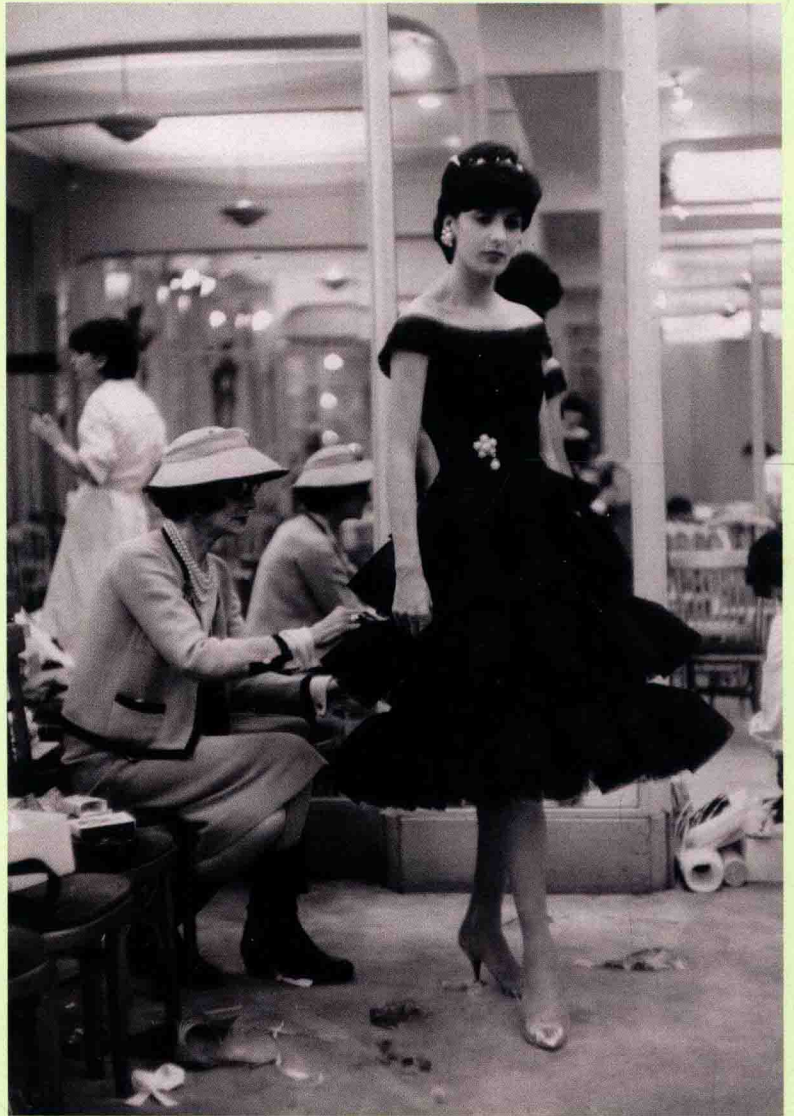
From the very early beginnings of my career, the nature of my work and the research involved attracted attention not only from the fashion industry but also from international curators and other creative practitioners with whom I collaborated on many projects. It was often acknowledged that my work could be interpreted in the context of ‘designer as researcher’.

One key collection was the ‘Braille Collection’ launched in 1998, researched through interviews with the Royal National Institute for the Blind. Relatively ignored at the time, this collection went on to be exhibited globally, utilized by the design team of Renault Cars and featured in the major retrospective exhibition ‘Archaeology of the Future: 20 years of Trend Forecasting’ in 2009 by the world’s most renowned trend forecaster, Li Edelkoort.

It is so important for students and designers to understand that they cannot design alone in the world. This book helps to disseminate that information and bring an openness to all creative thinking. Research develops a personal memory bank of grounded critical thinking, enabling a designer to facilitate sustainable outcomes within a global fashion industry that is often running to catch up with itself.

Shelley Fox
Donna Karan Professor of Fashion
Parsons The New School for Design, New York



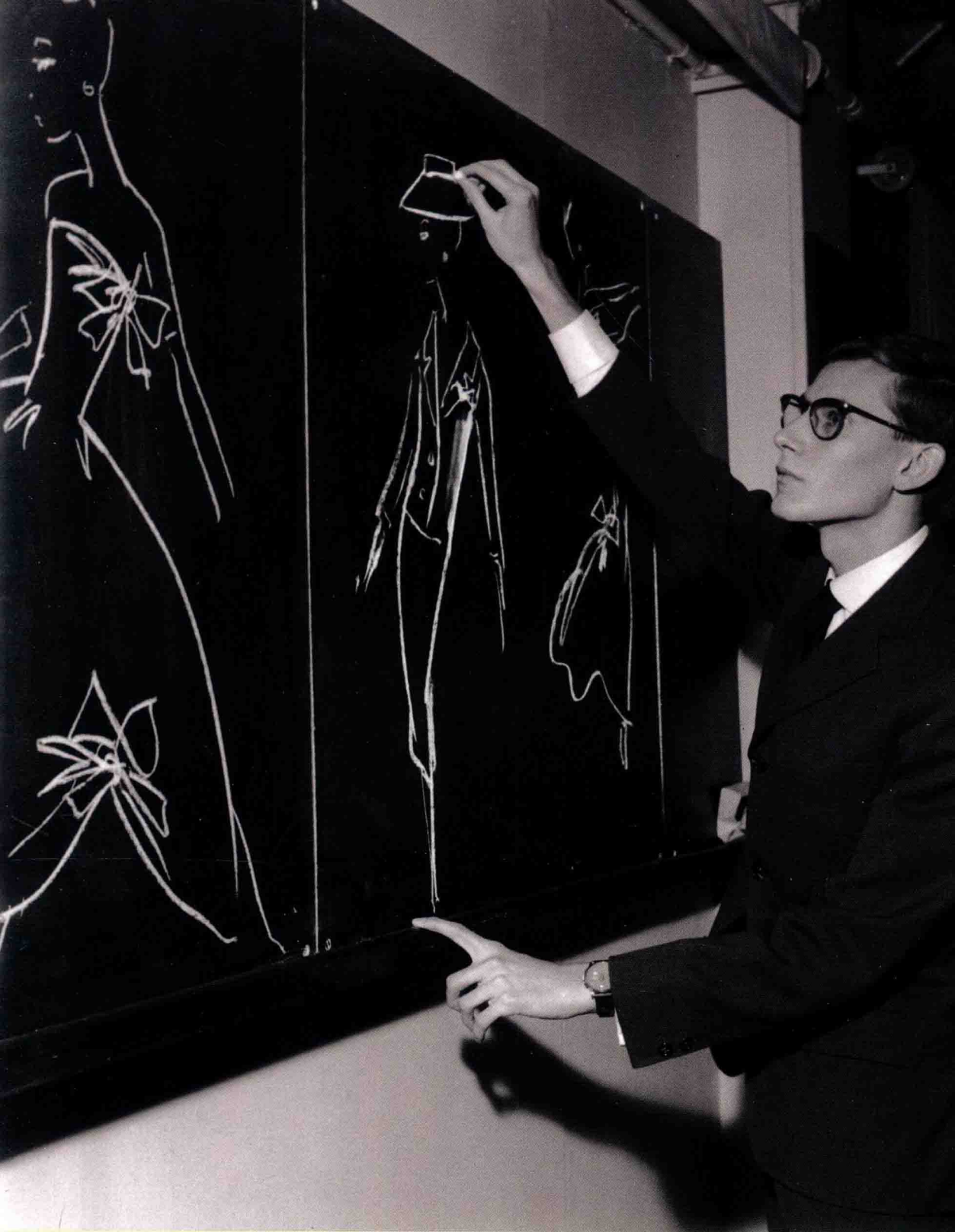


Above Coco Chanel wearing one of her signature tweed two-piece suits.

Opposite A young Yves Saint Laurent sketching on a chalkboard.

INTRODUCTION

In modern fashion design and education, the ability to carry out thorough visual research is considered a key skill; without it design cannot exist. No designer can create in a vacuum; the creative mind needs constant food and stimulus. The world today is obsessed with newness and innovation. In a sphere where you will hear that 'everything has been done before', it is the vital role of research to move the design process on, to create new inspirations and to bring new ideas together. Without solid research there can be no new design.





Alexander McQueen, one of the greats
of late 20th-century fashion..

The world of fashion design has changed enormously over the past hundred or so years. Even the concept of the 'fashion designer' is relatively new, being unknown until the early twentieth century, before which there were only dressmakers and tailors, and then the great French couturiers.

The early couturiers made seasonal variations of popular dress, but it was not until the time of the First World War that designers as we know them today came into being.

French designer Coco Chanel was perhaps the earliest and the most influential. The 'flapper' style of the 1920s was mostly her invention, and she championed the little black dress, womenswear inspired by menswear, the Chanel suit, matelot style and costume jewelry. She was also probably the first designer to use the logo, her intertwined Cs as recognizable today as they were eighty years ago.

In the late 1920s another female designer emerged in Paris. A friend of the great artists of the day, including Marcel Duchamp, Jean Cocteau and Man Ray, Elsa Schiaparelli began her business by producing a collection of trompe l'oeil sweaters very much in the Surrealist manner. Much of her design was inspired by art, and was, indeed, themed: she was truly one of the first designers to be inspired by what was happening around her, and by things outside fashion, rather than just by clothing itself. Referred to by Chanel, rather disparagingly, as 'the Italian artist who makes clothes', Schiaparelli flourished until the Second World War. Like Chanel, she leaves behind an enduring fashion legacy.

After the war had ended in 1945, Christian Dior came to the fore with his 'New Look', a much softer and more voluminous style than the austere, boxy look of wartime. Fashion again became a business of subtle reinvention, with little informing it other than the clothes themselves – until the arrival on the fashion scene of the young designer Yves Saint Laurent. Saint Laurent was employed by Christian Dior, and on Dior's untimely death in 1957, he became the head of the House of Dior. After mixed reviews at Dior and a spell of National Service, he founded the House of Saint Laurent, and set about the business of creating fashion trends like no one before him. The Beatnik style, the graphic grid paintings of Mondrian, the colours of North Africa, the reinvention of the tuxedo for women, the gypsy look and the safari suit... all were employed to great effect. His subsequent invention of prêt-à-porter, or ready-to-wear, made fashion younger, more accessible and, most of all, more fun.

Art and fashion, as in the 1920s and 1930s, again became bedfellows with the advent of Op art and Pop art in the 1950s–60s; fashion was moving very much more quickly, and designers began to be inspired by the fast-moving world around them, as well as beginning to look back in time for fresh inspiration. New innovations in fabrics and manufacturing added to the momentum, combined with the new disposable income of the young and their increasing interest in fashion.

1

THE RESEARCH PROCESS