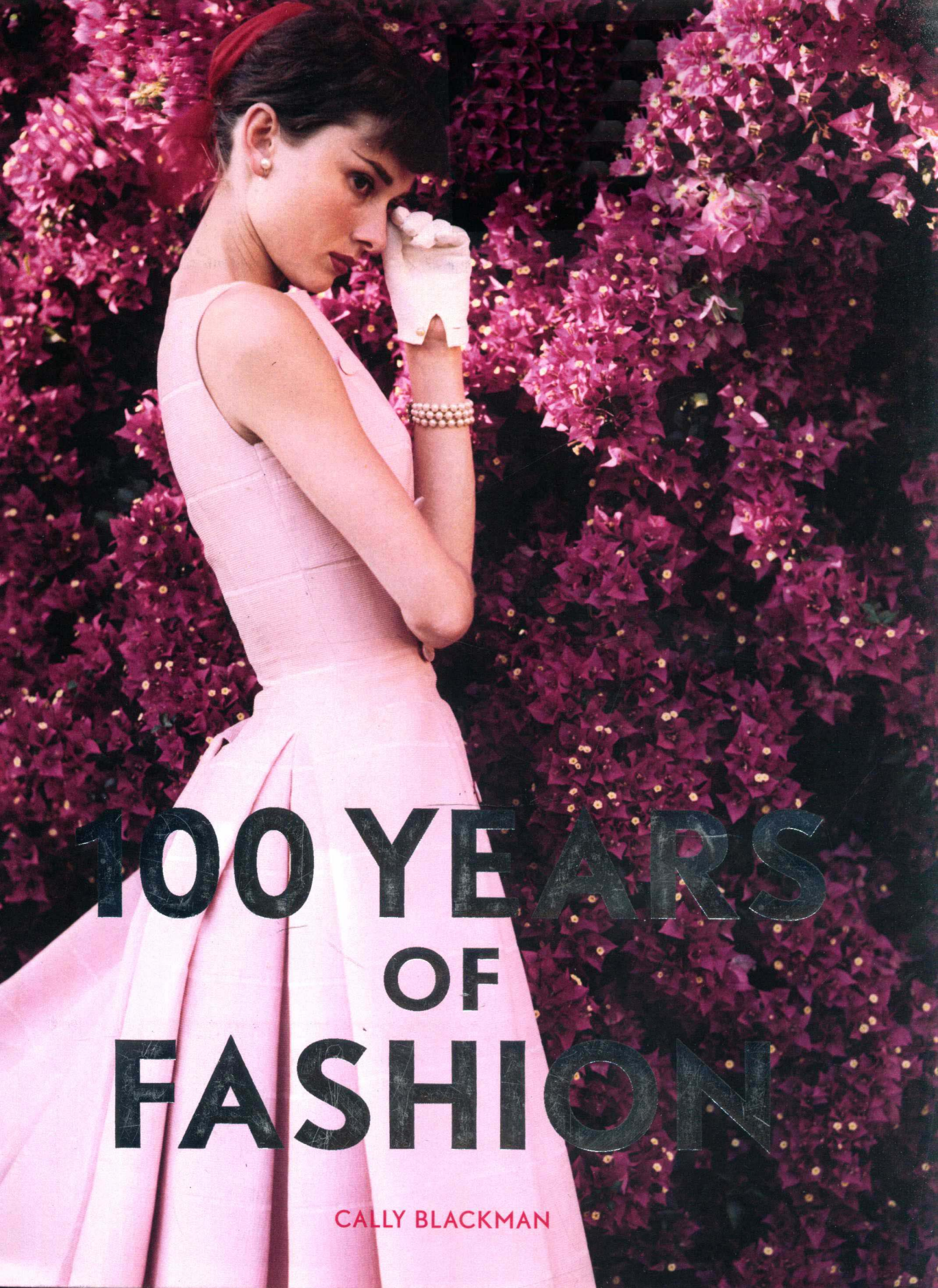

100 YEARS OF FASHION

CALLY BLACKMAN

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Cally Blackman

Laurence King Publishing

LAURENCE KING

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1963 Jean Shrimpton in Marc Bohan for Dior

Introduction

This book shows fashion as it was represented in the ideal world and lived in the real world over the last century. This period witnessed the most rapid development in the production and dissemination of fashion to date, and the greatest transformation in its consumption: from the dominance of couture for the elite few at the turn of the twentieth century, to the near-universality of fast-fashion today, on the high street or at the click of a mouse. Catwalk shows are now streamed live on the internet; designer collections are assimilated by high-street chains almost overnight; fashion-forward looks on the street are relayed by a groundswell of digital media: affordable clothes are bought in quantity and discarded at will. This transformation in fashion's consumption reflects, and is inseparable from, the seismic changes in society that have taken place over the last century: the end of empires and colonial rule, revolutions fuelled by political ideologies, two World Wars, economic and environmental disasters, artistic movements, design innovation and the digital age; all have shaped the way we live now and the way we now live fashion.

The domination of the leading couture houses, dressmakers and tailoring establishments of Paris and London that held sway for a hundred years was challenged in the early twentieth century by the avant garde, who disdained bourgeois values: by the 1940s a sartorial revolution was gathering pace (in tandem with access to a wider variety of music) in the form of sub-cultural and youth-oriented styles that became immensely influential in the second half of the century. In the United States, clothes' manufacturing processes were streamlined and standardization of sizing pioneered, driving the ready-to-wear market, and new fashion democracies were forged in which reliance on the Old World was replaced by the homegrown talent of the New. The regeneration of haute couture after the Second World War lasted only a decade: by the 1960s, couturiers either responded to the youthful zeitgeist, or went out of business. Prêt-à-porter, diffusion lines and a focus on commercial franchises kept the couture industry afloat, making the designers more accessible, yet a continuing emphasis on luxury and exclusivity maintains the polarization between high fashion and the mainstream. Celebrity is the new aristocracy: a century ago the language communicated by clothes was easier to interpret, the sartorial codes given off by a duchess distinct from those imparted by a middle class housewife. These signs are now much more difficult to read: what we wear is no longer dictated by class, status or occupation, but is a reflection of money, aspiration and fame. Fashion, like society, is more fluid but not necessarily more democratic.

Fashion is frequently scorned as superficial, a result of its inbuilt ephemerality. As 'garment manufacture', it might be recognized more positively as the trillion-dollar global industry it is now, employing hundreds of thousands of people across the world to meet our ever-increasing demand for novelty and need for self-expression in the post-modern age. We are all subjects of fashion: as Oscar Wilde, with typical irony, said in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: 'It is only the shallow people who do not judge by appearances'.

1901–1959

1901–1959

1907 Mlle Wilford in toilette de ville by Doucet *Les Modes*
A day dress for April with fur stole and feathered hat by Doucet, one of the oldest couture houses in Paris. Known for delicate, feminine designs that epitomized the Art Nouveau aesthetic, the house did not adapt to the sleek styles of the modern age, closing in 1932.

At the beginning of the twentieth century fashion was dictated by the Parisian couture houses, the most prestigious of which, founded in the mid nineteenth century by Englishman Charles Frederick Worth (1825–1895), continued to dress the top echelons of society: royalty, aristocracy, wealthy women, 'professional beauties' and celebrities of the day who peopled the fashionable world.

Those who could not afford the House of Worth's exorbitant prices patronized one of the many other couturiers, such as Doucet, Doeuillet, Laferrière, Jeanne Paquin or the Callot Soeurs. Appointed dressmakers in St. Petersburg and London provided court and ceremonial dress, while British firms such as Redfern, and Creed, both with Paris branches, were the acknowledged masters of the tailored garment, still an important element of female dress.

The cream of American society, those included in Mrs Astor's 'Four Hundred' (the number of guests that could fit into her New York ballroom), made frequent trips across the Atlantic to buy clothes: Astors, Cooper Hewitts, Morgans, Potter Palmers and Vanderbilts, among them the 'dollar princesses' who bolstered the fortunes of both the couture houses and the impoverished European aristocrats whom they married in return for title and rank.

Entire trousseaux were ordered for young brides, fabulous sums spent on toilettes ordered, sometimes by the dozen, to meet the demands of a hectic social life that required different clothes for different times of day and degrees of formality. Throughout the day – morning, riding, afternoon, visiting, relaxing *en famille*, dinner, evening, ball, gala, opera, theatre and court – all occasions demanded specific outfits, necessitating a minimum of three or four changes. Mourning dictated a range of garments in black. Lavishly decorated with embroidery, beading, rare lace and tulle, accessorized with furs, these opulent ensembles were the ultimate statements of conspicuous consumption. The constricting S-bend corset that pushed the bosom forwards and the hips backwards; high, wired collars, a bosom draped in a froth of lace and chiffon, monumental picture hats decorated with flowers, feathers and sometimes whole birds, resulted in a heavy, statuesque at best, appearance.

High Society was ruled by the Season, in the early summer, a hectic round of social events: from the presentation of debutantes and the visiting *haut monde* at court – spectacular occasions that required the most formal dress and a full panoply of glittering jewels – to the races at Ascot, Chantilly and Cowes. These were interspersed with numerous receptions, dinners and balls. After the Season ended, summers were spent at villas in fashionable resorts such as Biarritz or Deauville, cruising the oceans on luxury yachts, shooting on Scottish estates or languishing at Long Island house parties, before returning to 'Town' for the autumn social round. Velvet, satin or silk evening gowns revealed bare shoulders and arms encased in long kid gloves and a generous décolletage on which to display jewellery. Daywear consisted of tailored suits or elaborately embellished gowns accompanied by a plethora of accessories, from picture hats to parasols. Simpler summer frocks or blouses and skirts made from cotton,

lawn and linen were trimmed with broderie anglaise or lace. These extensive wardrobes included ensembles from Paris fashion houses, several of which had branches in New York and London, and also licensed copies of their couture models to be made by manufacturers and dressmakers. Accessories and lingerie were purchased from specialist houses, or the more exclusive department stores.

Some women chose not to conform to society's expectations, dressing 'artistically', outside mainstream fashion. These 'bohemians' moved in avant-garde circles and might buy from Liberty or the Omega Workshops in London, Fortuny in Venice, or the Wiener Werkstätte, a small but influential co-operative of artists and designers in Vienna that aimed to reform dress. Female artists, such as the painter Sonia Delaunay, embarked on a mission to integrate fashion and art, or to design clothes that expressed new ideologies – including the Russian Constructivists Liubov Popova and Vavara Stepanova. These women were part of the intense artistic experimentation taking place during the first two decades of the century. New 'isms' were burgeoning across Europe: Fauvism and Cubism in Paris; Secessionism in Austria; Expressionism in Germany; Futurism in Italy and Constructivism in Russia; to be followed by Surrealism and Modernism. Painters, poets, musicians, writers and architects inhabited a mythical land called Bohemia (whether in reality based in Bloomsbury, Montmartre or Schwabing) where dress was symbolic of freedom from bourgeois constraint, physical constraint and, more importantly, of their aim to integrate all aspects of art and design, including dress, into daily life: so-called *Gesamkunstwerk*, the total work of art. Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, their revolutionary music, stage sets and costumes, introduced a further dramatic influence on contemporary culture, including fashion, after their first sensational season in Paris in 1909.

In Paris, Paul Poiret (1879–1944), who opened his salon in 1903, was the first couturier to match this dynamism in his work, simplifying the silhouette, relying not on complex construction but dramatic colour schemes, combined with exquisite surface decoration, for effect. His early *Directoire* line was followed, around the turn of the decade, by an Orientalist mode: loose, wrapped kimono-style coats with Chinese, Japanese or Persian motifs, diaphanous tunics wired at the hem, edged with fur or gold fringing and worn over harem pants. The English-born Lucile (Lady Duff Gordon 1863–1935) was a successful designer whose delicate 'gowns of emotion', with suitably melodramatic names such as 'The Sighing Sound of Lips Unsatisfied', modelled by statuesque mannequins, were less daring than Poiret's but also influenced by artistic considerations.

Since the last quarter of the previous century, women had been admitted to some universities and the struggle for the vote was well under way, although universal suffrage in England was not won until after the First World War. The bicycle and public transport enabled independent travel for the masses; a greater variety of jobs became available and more women worked, although for many, domestic servitude or factory labour remained the only options. Women's lives were changing rapidly, a process accelerated by the outbreak of the First World War. Some went to the front as doctors, nurses, drivers, or members of the auxiliary forces; those who remained at home replaced men absent from factories, on transport and working the land. Several of these occupations required women to adopt the forms of dress traditionally the preserve of men: practical breeches, trousers or overalls.

c. 1929 Alma Smith sunbathing
Sun worship was encouraged by doctors and scientists as beneficial to health. Here Alma Smith, a soubrette in musical theatre, stands under a sun lamp to get her daily dose of ultraviolet.

The 1914–1918 war barely slowed the business of high fashion: many Parisian couturiers continued to show their collections, although the dangers of Atlantic crossings limited the attendance of foreign buyers, press coverage and exports to North America, where department stores seized the opportunity to fill the temporary vacuum by promoting American designers. However, the allure of French couture was too great to be overshadowed for any significant length of time and afterwards Paris regained its position as the capital of fashion. Some changes of sartorial necessity also reverted to prewar status – trousers were not accepted as fashionable dress for women for many years, only worn by a daring few until well after the Second World War. What had changed was society itself: the old social hierarchies began to disappear as a result of war, revolution, political upheaval and economic hardship: the days when wealthy households employed vast retinues of domestic staff were gone forever.

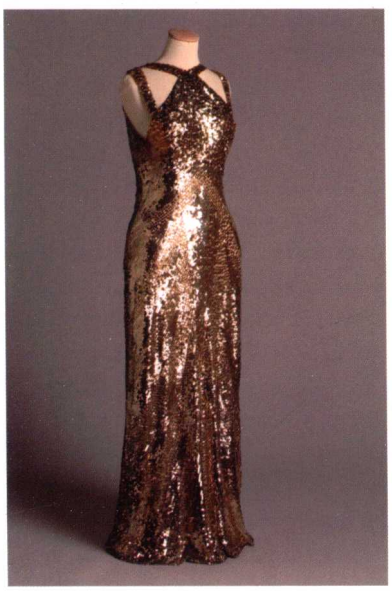
The New Woman of pre-War days became the Amazon of the Art Deco era, or the independent Flapper who cut her hair into a short bob, drank cocktails, possibly took drugs, certainly smoked in public and danced late into the night at fashionable clubs, cabarets or bohemian dives. The majority of women did not live like this, of course; the Flapper was more a figment of retrospective popular imagination than fact, although the media attention given to the scandalous behaviour of the 'Bright Young Things' might lead one to believe otherwise. The androgynous *garçonne* style of the 1920s flattened the bosom, dispelled the waist and revealed the legs, reducing the silhouette to a short tube, topped with head-hugging cloche hat. Corsets were not totally abandoned, but moderated to achieve the required boyish figure; the development of new materials, including elastics and zippers (patented in 1924) made foundation garments less cumbersome, while synthetic fibres such as rayon made hosiery and lingerie less expensive and more appealing. By the end of the 1920s, hemlines were wavering; handkerchief points or dipped hems marked the transition from Flapper to glamour and a figure-revealing, more feminine silhouette emerged in the 1930s.

Travel and transport were improving rapidly: women embraced the excitement of speed on the roads and the racing track, female aviators joined them as pioneers of the modern machine age. Initially, these Amazons wore protective clothing similar to that worn by men: leather jackets, overalls, helmets and goggles, or they adapted everyday dress as they did for sports such as tennis, skiing and golf. As the popularity of sport increased, dedicated sportswear became the speciality of some couture houses such as Jean Patou (1880–1936) and Elsa Schiaparelli. The stretch quality ideal for active wear was provided by knitted fabrics that also transformed swimwear from voluminous bathing dresses with bloomers to streamlined garments giving maximum exposure for tanned bodies and slim figures honed by new exercise crazes and dietary regimes: the athletic figure became an expression of modernity.

Four female couturières dominated Paris in the interwar years: Jeanne Lanvin, Madeleine Vionnet, Coco Chanel and Elsa Schiaparelli.

Jeanne Lanvin (1867–1946) was best known for her pretty, romantic *robes de style*, taffeta evening gowns with paniered skirts inspired by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century silhouettes. Her meticulous research into historical and ethnic dress and textiles informed her aesthetic approach

1931 Clara Bow in *No Limit*
Clara Bow became the original 'It Girl' when she starred in the film of the same name in 1927. In a shimmering silver lamé dress, possibly by Travis Banton (head costume designer at Paramount Studios 1925 – 1938), she exudes the glamour and sex appeal cinemagoers came to see.



c. 1935 Evening dress
Hollywood attracted female audiences through glamour. Cinemas ran newsreels of fashion shows and features on the world of couture that allowed a glimpse into the lives of the rich, famous and fashionable. A gold sequined evening dress shows the influence of Hollywood style.

and unwavering style. That she maintained her success during a period when this style bucked the current trend is testament to her skill in interpreting what many women actually wanted to wear.

Madeleine Vionnet (1876–1975) will always be associated with the bias cut, i.e. cutting fabric at a 45° angle rather than along the straight grain. She was not the first to use this method, but she explored it to its fullest potential by draping, knotting and twisting supple fabrics to highlight the contours of the body in much the same way as the Classical dress she studied on Greek vases. Her innovative construction methods dispensed with seams and fastenings, resulting in garments whose simple appearance belied their complexity.

Coco Chanel (1883–1971) was, in life as well as in her work, the great exponent of modernism in dress, designing clothes in fluid jersey fabrics, easy-to-wear separates derived from sportswear and men's garments. The best exemplar of her own style, she wore trousers on holiday, mixed costume jewellery with the real thing and made a suntan fashionable. She was the first designer to put her name on a perfume bottle with the launch of CHANEL N°5 in 1921 and she lifted black from the colour of mourning to the failsafe colour of elegance with her 'little black dress' of 1926. Her signature tweed suits and two-tone shoes, still updated seasonally by Karl Lagerfeld, are instantly recognizable as the inventions of a woman who has been called the most influential designer of the twentieth century.

Elsa Schiaparelli (1890–1973), having been successful with a small range of knitwear, set up her fashion house in Paris in 1928 with a focus on playful but practical styles and sportswear that appealed to a broad range of clients, including Hollywood film stars. She became known for sharp, tailored suits, embellished with embroidery and beading with a twist of fantasy and wit, in the form of a lollipop button or a humorous buckle. She was always highly experimental but it was her collaborations with the Surrealists, including Salvador Dalí and Jean Cocteau, that broke new ground in the attempt to make fashion art and art fashion. This mission still continues, despite the inherent dislocation between the two, namely that fashion has to function.

By the early 1930s, the fashionable silhouette was evolving into a slender, elongated torso with widening shoulders and a neat head with softly waved short hair. Tailored suits and floral dresses were fitted at natural waist level and flared out to the hem. For evening, body-hugging satin gowns were given dramatic effect by being backless, worn with lavish fox furs, or short bolero jackets. This was a sophisticated look epitomized by Hollywood stars whose every outfit was avidly followed by thousands of adoring fans whether on screen, in the movie fanzines or general press. It was the 'Golden Age' of cinema, the single most popular form of entertainment between the Wars, attracting huge audiences on a weekly basis. Stars adhered to various stereotypes from Clara Bow's Flapper and Theda Bara's vamp, to Marlene Dietrich's *femme fatale* or Greta Garbo's exotic Mata Hari. The major studios employed their own in-house costume designers, Travis Banton and Edith Head at Paramount and Gilbert Adrian at MGM; Head and Adrian each went on to launch their own clothing lines.

Cinema was a major disseminator of fashion in the interwar period. Department stores opened sections dedicated to promoting film costumes and Hollywood claimed to have more influence over women's fashion choices than Paris couturiers, who in turn found they had little or no influence over Hollywood. Chanel and Schiaparelli were commissioned to design for the cinema, but failed to understand the need for timelessness: when the movies