1950s Vintage Fashion - the Decade of Style by EmmaB

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The 1950's were exciting years in the world of fashion. Following a period of imposed frugality during the war, the media was highlighting glamour that had never been seen before so widely, and the effects that Hollywood would have on the way that women dressed during this period was to create an impact that no-one could have anticipated.

The early fifties saw the introduction of more ladies into the workplace, and the styles that were created for day to day wear included suits with a tailored look, skirts that hugged waistlines, and blouses that were worn discreetly under tailored jackets that were pulled in at the waist to give a flattering and glamorous look that accentuated shape and style.

The hourglass figure became the ideal as stylised by actresses like Marilyn Monroe, or took on the Audrey Hepburn demure and sophistication. Gone were the financial restraints of the war torn world, and the availability of materials was widened, meaning that the beginnings of mass production of affordable fashion was guaranteed to be a success.

The Festival of Britain exhibition in 1951 was to exhibit fabrics that had never been used before in the western world and the beginnings of a new era that was to shape the fashion industry's future began from humble beginnings, though flourished because women were no longer thought of as housewives, and although many remained faithful to the society image of the mother in the home, a certain element of glamour became not only the norm, but an acceptable part of life for women all over the world.

Higher standards of manufacture were employed by companies like Marks and Spencer whose trademark for producing quality items shone, and the high streets began to sport those designs that had otherwise been beyond the price bracket of ordinary people, many of whom had resorted to making their own clothing, simply because of lack of availability.

Designers of the times such as Dior and Givenchy went away from the traditional towards new beginnings introducing shapes that emphasised the silhouette of a woman's shape, rather than boning clothing in the uncomfortable manner of the 40s, realising that women wanted glamour though also wanted functional clothing that was more comfortable and easier to wear.

The world was looking at example, and nowhere was this more common than here in England where a man named Hartnell designed the clothing that would be worn by the young Princess Elizabeth who would be crowned in the early fifties and was appearing on television in homes all over the globe, influencing the way people perceived fashion available to the masses, whereas once it had only been available to those that could afford designs by Fashion houses like Christian Dior.

The fifties brought a new prosperity to the world, and also the vision of Hollywood greats, and the availability of cinema as one of the most popular forms of entertainment, which would influence women worldwide to the glamorous looks and style of their favourite stars.

Music was not exempt from it's followers either, and the rock 'n' roll era was to make a split in fashion styles, taking women away from the traditional to the Teddy Boy styles that went hand in hand with jiving and lindyhopping. Here, the sporting of pony tails became popular with younger women, and even though this style broke away from the neat hairstyles of the day, the clothing style for women was every bit as feminine and glamorous with full skirts, emphasised waistlines, and subtle colour to fabrics.

With the availability of silks, cottons and natural fabrics, many home dressmakers were taking their ideals from magazines and media and translating these into creations, using the patterns supplied by the biggest manufacturers of dress patterns of the day, such as Vogue, Simplicity and Butterick, who had made the glamour styles available to those who wished to pursue the fashion style themselves without buying.

The Chanel style of suit was to become a popularised style and one that was creatively changed and modified to suit either the tall lady or the shorter lady, using different lengths and fabrics to achieve a totally different look, while keeping the neckline and open front of jackets in the traditional Chanel style, braided at the edges with contrasting material and worn with lightweight sweaters and blouses.

The shoes worn within this period of history by women of the time were elegant and were modelled on designs from Italy, dainty footed, and with heels that were slim, and even those breakaway girls that joined in with the rock 'n' roll crowd, sported the heels to complement their outfits, only turning to more casual shoes and bobby socks in the late fifties.

This was a period that set up standards that would be followed by traditionalists for 20 years, and that set standards that are still perceived as glamorous to this day, when we are reminded of the stars of Hollywood and the impact that they had on society's perception of what women should look like, and what style declared femininity. Even the coats of the era were impressive styles that have been re-designed over the ages, though which have kept their standing as classical designs that work.

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