

AGE-DEFYING ICONS

Nine legendary women on the art of personal style.
By ELIO IANNACCI

SOPHIA LOREN

Working with wardrobe departments on more than 90 films, Sophia Loren has a relationship with clothing that few can fathom. In fact, the 77-year-old Neapolitan actress insists it is because of her close ties to the people she calls “the greatest fashion and costume designers of our time” that she feels qualified to impart any fashion wisdom.

“Find someone who lives for clothes and learn from them,” she suggests via phone from her home in Geneva. “Along with Valentino and Yves Saint Laurent, who taught me how to choose great fabrics, I had the fortune of knowing the maestro—Emilio Schuberth,” she says. The late Italian designer’s claim to fame was dressing golden age beauties such as Ingrid Bergman and Rita Hayworth. “Although I believe stylists and designers should *not* influence your personal style, they *can* educate you when it comes to things like cuts and fabrics,” says Loren. “Your clothes are highly personal and your choices tell people who you are. Having someone dictate your look can be like surrendering your identity.”

Self-assurance is something that Loren is quite comfortable speaking about. Having been in the public eye for more than six decades (she was 15 when she filmed her first feature) in one of the most youth-driven industries on the planet, Loren says she quickly learned to stop comparing herself to other actresses in her league. “I never had Audrey Hepburn’s body, so I never bothered to dress like her,” Loren says. “My experience in the world of cinema taught me to listen to my curves—they dictate the designs I choose.

“I also learned how *not* to dress from three characters I played in *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*,” she says of the 1963 comedy she starred in. “They were extreme versions of women. One was an underprivileged lady named Adelina who sold cigarettes on the streets—she looked sloppy,” she says. “Another character I played in the film was Anna, a sophisticated politician’s wife in Milan. The house of Dior made her furs and dresses—they were very conservative and too constricting for me. And the third [role] was Mara, a Roman call girl, who wore brilliant but far too revealing pieces for me.”

Referring to herself as “an eternal 12-year-old spirit,” Loren says her Oscar-winning performance in 1960’s *Two Women* changed her life and her aesthetic. “That film took me in a serious, artistic direction,” she says intensely. “Every part of me was transformed.”

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SILVER SCREEN COLLECTION/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY



TWIGGY

Twiggy's career as a model may have lasted for less than five years—she debuted in 1966 and retired in 1970—but her beanpole figure, boyish hair and Bambi-like eyes have made her one of the most inspirational names in fashion history. In fact, Twiggy's daughter, Carly Lawson—who works for Stella McCartney as a print maker—has grown so accustomed to seeing vintage photos of her mother around the office that she barely bats an eyelash when mom is mentioned.

"Carly often phones me up and says, 'The design team just referenced another photo of you,'" says Twiggy (whose real name is Lesley Lawson), from her home in London. "Some shots I haven't even seen."

When it comes to her personal fashion philosophy, Twiggy—who recently designed a line for Marks and Spencer—is a sartorial libertarian. "I don't think anyone should put an age on what people wear. If you look in my wardrobe, it's still mainly trousers and great 1940s jackets. I'm not going to run around in hot pants at my age, but I've got a look that hasn't changed enormously," she says. "One of my idols is Fred Astaire."

Twiggy's career choices have been just as nonconformist as her tomboy looks. After leaving the modelling biz, she was soon cast in a musical film called *The Boy Friend*, in a role that earned her two Golden Globes (18 films and 20 albums followed). Her latest disc, *Romantically Yours*, has her singing love-struck standards from artists such as Gershwin and Neil Young. As with her confident approach to dressing, Twiggy wasn't preoccupied with the originals. "I wasn't trying to compete with Ella Fitzgerald!" she says, laughing. "I just felt the need to offer my own spin on something classic."

YOKO ONO

Birthdays are not low-key affairs for Yoko Ono. This past February, when the activist/artist/singer turned 79, Ono asked her son, Sean Lennon, to book her reformed Plastic Ono Band—the rock group she founded with her late husband, John Lennon, in 1969—to play at New York's indie music mecca Le Poisson Rouge, so she could "rock the place down."

"I stopped believing in time long ago. It's such a man-made concept," the *New Yorker* says. "So is acting your age. John came from an era when rockers were afraid of getting old. Life keeps my heart and mind young."

It isn't surprising that fashion designers ranging from Marc Jacobs (whose Fall 2007 show paid tribute to Ono) to Proenza Schouler (whose Fall 2012 collection reflected her closet circa 1970) have been tapping into Ono's Tribeca-meets-Tokyo look. "My taste level gets better by being in a constant state of transformation," she says. "Movement—I highly recommend it."

In the past year, Ono ventured back into the studio to record a song for an upcoming Occupy Wall Street benefit album and launched art exhibits in New Delhi and Tokyo (in June she opens another show in London). "Whether it's fashion, music or art," she says, "events make the best teachers."



PHOTOGRAPHY: TWIGGY BY BERT STERN/CORBIS



JOAN COLLINS

You are what you wear. At least that's what actress Joan Collins thinks. And with a past filled with opulence—she regularly had her hair styled by Vidal Sassoon in the '70s, sat front row at Gianni Versace's shows in the '80s and walked down the aisle in designer bridalwear five times—it should come as no surprise that the 78-year-old thinks that in some cases, clothes do make the woman.

"How you look is a manifestation of how you feel inside," Collins says from her penthouse in West Hollywood. "If you feel like hell then you'll look like hell. Dressing should enhance you. The older you get, the more important it is to look put-together and groomed—without looking like a throwback to the 1950s."

Most often associated with the big hair, big shoulders and big-top glamour connected to her portrayal of Alexis Carrington on *Dynasty*, the *Downton Abbey* of the 1980s, Collins is pleased to see that a few of her most lavish looks from that time have been reimagined on the runway. "I happen to think the 1980s was [one] of the best decades in fashion," the Brit says, adding that she feels that much of Alexis's wardrobe was ahead of its time. "Especially when you look at what is going on with Balenciaga. At the time, I don't think that I was given great reviews for my clothes," she says, taking a dramatic pause. "It's nice to be appreciated a couple of decades later...I still wear a lot of my '80s pieces. It's important to go back into your closet and reuse what looks good on you. I don't think you should buy new pieces just for the sake of buying," she adds, sharing Kate Middleton's approach to dressing.

Currently touring a one-woman show, Collins is also penning her 18th book, a memoir titled *Passion for Life*. "I've collected over 300 photographs for it," she says. "Of course, photos of me with Versace, Michael Kors and Valentino are all in the pile!"

DONNA KARAN

When Donna Karan is asked if the term "age-appropriate dressing" is a useful one, she succinctly offers this response: "Feeling good is the most appropriate way to dress at any age. That's the goal. The older you get, the more you know your body and style and what looks good."

It is precisely this type of conviction that makes the 63-year-old New Yorker one of the most consistently well-reviewed fashion designers in America. Case in point? Her Spring 2012 collection was praised for its prints inspired by the work of Haitian painter Philippe Dodard, whom Karan discovered while travelling to Haiti in 2010 for philanthropic work. For Fall 2012, Karan injected an extra ounce of esteem into her designs, naming her ready-to-wear collection WoMan because, she says, "it's about the strength and shoulder of a man with the sensuality and sculpture of a woman's body." Echoing Karan's longstanding mission to redefine what womenswear *can* be, her latest designs aim to combine yin, yang and Zen.

"I was striving to empower women through a marriage of strength and softness," she says. "A well-shouldered, well-tailored jacket gives you a sense of authority and therefore confidence." Aside from actual clothes, Karan notes that there is another way to fuel your personal style: "Listen to your inner voice," she suggests, "not outside ones."



PHOTOGRAPHY: COLLINS BY WALLACE SEAWELL/MPFI IMAGES; KARAN BY RUVEN AFANADOR



ANNIE NIGHTINGALE

Warning: Anyone who approaches Annie Nightingale with all that “30 is the new 20” talk will be immediately shut down. Holding the Guinness World Record for having the longest career as a female DJ, the 70-year-old Brit insists that the above maxim about aging needs to be “put to pasture.”

“Nobody should ever be seeking to be the new anything,” Nightingale says from her home in London. “Nothing’s more hip than finding yourself, and nothing’s more depressing than living your life trying to be someone else.” It’s hard to disagree with someone who’s credited for chronicling the rise of both the Rolling Stones and the Beatles (Paul McCartney proposed to her—she declined), all while wearing outfits by Courrèges and Mary Quant. Then there’s her ongoing BBC Radio 1 show, which airs every Friday from 2 a.m. to 4 a.m. Week after week, Nightingale urges her listeners to support what she thinks will be the next British invasion—a group of hip, young breakbeat artists.

“So much can be learned from them,” she says of street-style-savvy artists such as Katy B and Krafty Kuts. “It’s such a rush being around people who are constantly experimenting with their tastes. My job never gets old, and neither do I!”

Having been privy to a mountain of fads in fashion and music through the years, Nightingale feels that most trends are born in nightclubs and music festivals.

“The crowds at these places are so investigational with the way they dress,” she says, recalling how platform shoes went from the disco dance floors to the catwalk, and mini rave backpacks jumped from warehouse parties to design houses. “It’s like watching pre-runway,” she says. “Now we have jumpsuits and fun fur again. All the pieces that come from house music and electro camps, it’s all on the high street! If you pay attention to the way these looks come and go and the way they get modernized, you’ll always have an upper hand.”

DEBORAH HARRY

In the spring of 1973, Deborah Harry fell in love with a bottle of peroxide, an East Village bar called CBGB and a guitarist named Chris Stein. By the time the winter of ’75 rolled around, she had dyed 80 per cent of her hair platinum, formed a band with Stein named Blondie and headlined the CBGB stage.

Billboard hits followed (including “Heart of Glass” and “Rapture”), which branded Blondie as one of few punk-era outfits that dared to mix ska, disco, reggae and rap into their rock. In an effort to mirror the band’s idiosyncratic sound, Harry went on to construct one of popular culture’s most enduring and emulated personas (see: Madonna and Lady Gaga).

Over the phone from New York, Harry, 66, says that her punk-meets-pin-up look had everything to do with the people she loved hanging out with. “I couldn’t help but get affected by spending time with all these great artists who seemed to be on the fringes of everything,” she says. “Meeting [fashion designer] Stephen Sprouse was a revelation. We bonded on so many levels. He took that Hollywood bombshell idea and that mod ’60s idea I was playing with and helped me toughen it up, modernize it. No one else has shaped my taste level in that way.”

Similar to Sprouse—who designed his collections purely on instinct—Harry’s own fashion tips hark back to her rabble-rousing CBGB days. “I’m a big believer in how your reaction to your environment can make for interesting style,” she says. “I was running furiously away from becoming one of the New Jersey housewives I grew up seeing,” she explains. “Out of sheer frustration, I went the other way, styling myself in ripped-up clothing. I still like that deconstructed look.”

Aside from touring the world to promote Blondie’s ninth studio album, *Panic of Girls*, Harry is keeping busy in the studio. Her newest pair of recordings includes a soon-to-be-released track for the Occupy Wall Street benefit disc and a duet with Nick Cave on a tribute album for the late Jeffrey Lee Pierce.

“Problems don’t seem to be as threatening,” she says, referring to her outlook on aging. “You become better and better at what you do.”



PHOTOGRAPHY: NIGHTINGALE BY POPPER/GETTY; HARRY BY SARAH DUNN/CONTOUR

IRIS APFEL

At 90, Iris Apfel is becoming more of a household fashion name than some of the busiest runway models in the business. The interior designer—who has worked on rooms in the White House—has been the focus of an exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, collaborated on a makeup collection with M.A.C and been featured in several books including *Rare Bird of Fashion: The Irreverent Iris Apfel* and the recently published *Advanced Style*.

Typically seen in piles of heavy bangles, multi-hued separates and saucer-sized glasses, Apfel has turned so many heads in her time that Albert Maysles—one of the masterminds behind the original *Grey Gardens* film—is directing a documentary on her glittering life and times. All this attention stems from the fact that Apfel breaks more style rules than women a quarter of her age.

However, that doesn't mean she won't call out a fashion faux pas when she sees one. A definite Apfel no-no is going under the knife in an attempt to turn back the clock. "I'm very against cosmetic surgery," she says from her home in New York. "Subjecting yourself to all that pain just to make yourself look a few years younger is madness...as Coco Chanel reportedly said: Nothing makes a woman look so old as desperately trying hard to look young."

And what of style advice? "I think anyone without lipstick looks half dead—at least I do," she says, laughing. All joking aside, Apfel feels outfits should be chosen with a sense of joy rather than panic. "People get so uptight about getting dressed," she says. "If you make a mistake, so what? The fashion police aren't going to haul you off."



MARY MCFADDEN

In an industry obsessed with all that is young, fresh and new, Mary McFadden's approach to style is rare. Credited with being one of New York's most cerebral fashion designers during her eponymous label's rise in the '70s, '80s and '90s, McFadden's design process included touring the world in search of ancient art. Many of these inspirational adventures have been chronicled in a new self-titled tome published by Rizzoli.

"It took three editors and two years to sort through my archives," the 73-year-old reveals via phone from her home in New York. "I have two warehouses in Manhattan filled with clothes, so you can just imagine the amount of work!"

Her advice to those who wish to achieve great style? "Convention isn't something you should follow. You have to be artistic to want to create yourself in a unique image," she suggests. "If you want to live artfully, dress artfully."

Having just finished planning her next trip—an excursion to India to visit Alchi's Buddhist temples, situated at an altitude of more than 10,000 feet—McFadden says her expeditions have fuelled her creativity. "So many of my collections came from travelling to Greece, China, Rome and India," she says. "The clothes I have are like things you pick up from each journey. I still wear them. They remind me to learn from the past."