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FASHION DESIGN

LIST A (from *The Noughties to the Forties*)

- ❖ **“The Twentieth Century”, by Clare Hibbert, Adam Hibbert, Vol. 8, in *A History of Fashion and Costume*, New York City, Facts on File Inc., Bailey Publishing Associates (July 1, 2005).**

The Noughties

The dawn of the twentieth century was a time of excitement and optimism. The first skyscrapers were appearing on the skylines of cities such as Chicago and New York. In Paris, France, the World’s Fair of 1900 gave countries from around the world the chance to show off their latest achievements and inventions. Powered flight was just around the corner – the Wright brothers mastered it in December 1903.

The new century promised many changes and improvements, but at first, fashion remained much the same as it had been at the end of the nineteenth century. Styles for men, women, and children were extremely restrictive.

Hourglass Figures

For fashionable women at the turn of the century, the ideal body had an ample bosom, tiny waist, and large hips. Known as the hourglass or S-bend (because it followed the curves of a letter “S”), this silhouette was achieved by wearing a rigid, boned corset.

Helped by their maids, fashionable women usually changed clothes several times a day, wearing different outfits for morning, afternoon, and evening. Daytime clothes covered the whole body. Whether in dresses or separates, women wore high collars, puffed-out bodices, and full skirts, worn over layers of rustling petticoats.

Clothes were generally made by hand and involved enormous amounts of labor. Some dresses were embroidered with tiny flowers or draped with lace. Bodices or blouses were often pintucked, or decorated with sewn ribbons and bows.

From Teatime to Evening

The one time of day when women could escape their tight corsets was late afternoon. The tea gown was a loose, flowing gown worn before dressing for dinner. Comfortable but elegant, it was often made of light, floaty fabrics such as crêpe de chine, chiffon, or tulle. The most glamorous tea gowns were designed by exclusive couturiers, such as Lucile, Jacques Doucet, and Fortuny.

In the evening, wealthy women's dresses still swept the floor—some even had trains—but necklines plunged to reveal daring amounts of bosom. Sparkling beads and sequins decorated dresses, purses, and shoes.

At Work and Play - Women at Work

The satins, silks, and tulles worn by ladies of leisure were impractical for the growing numbers of independent middle-class women who went out to work. Sensible suits, known as tailormades, were aimed at governesses, typists, and store assistants. Made of hard-wearing tweed, which did not show the dirt, tailor-mades were also worn by wealthier women for traveling. They were teamed with a blouse which could be changed and washed more often.

Wearing separates, rather than an all-in-one dress, was popularized in the United States by an illustrated character known as the Gibson Girl. Created by artist Charles Gibson, she represented the new, modern woman and was often shown taking part in activities such as bicycling or playing tennis.

Men's Dress

Businessmen wore black morning coats with pinstriped trousers. Tweed or checked three-piece suits—a matching jacket, vest, and trousers—were also worn. All respectable men wore a hat outdoors, such as a derby, trilby, or even a straw boater.

On formal occasions, men still dressed in a top hat and frock coat, as they had in the 1800s. Originally based on a military coat, the frock coat was knee-length, came in at the waist, and was full at the back with pleats, buttons, and vents. It was worn with a vest and checked or pinstriped trousers.

The Teens

The period from 1910 to 1919 was dominated by World War I, known at the time as the Great War (1914–1918). Just as people were coming to terms with the staggering loss of lives in the trenches, a worldwide influenza epidemic claimed millions more lives.

People began to question the old social order. In Russia, the royal family was overthrown in the revolutions of 1917. The revolutionaries tried to free women from unpaid housework, cooking, and laundry.

Equality for women was also a big issue across Europe and America, although women only began to achieve full voting rights the following decade, for example in the United States (1920), Sweden (1921), and Britain (1928). Clothing reflected women's changing status, becoming generally less restrictive and more practical.

Reshaping the Body

For women, a new, straighter silhouette became fashionable, with less emphasis on the breasts and hips. There was even a revival of the highwaisted empire-line dress, originally made popular by the French 'empress Josephine in the early 1800s.

Corsets were no longer so tight and waist-pinching and were worn with long drawers. Women also wore a bust bodice to support the bosom. The brassière was patented in 1914 by the American Mary Phelps Jacobs. She is said to have constructed her first bra from two handkerchiefs and a length of ribbon.

The Hobble Skirt

Although the general trend was toward greater comfort, there was a notable exception. In 1911, French designer Paul Poiret created a long, narrow skirt that tapered in at the ankle. It allowed little room for movement, and the wearer could take only tiny steps.

Before long, the style had a nickname: the "hobble skirt." Despite its impracticality, it remained fashionable until just before the war.

Oriental Influences

Eastern-style clothes were popular with wealthy women early in the decade, then revived after the war. Kimonos, silk pajamas, baggy harem pants, tunic dresses, and turbans were made in colorful silks and brocades. Fabrics featured bold, exotic prints and were trimmed with tassels, feathers, or fur. This was another look championed by Paul Poiret but, unlike the hobble skirt, it was very comfortable and wearable.

Poiret was one of the decade's most important designers. He produced illustrated brochures that showed off his designs, and in 1912 and 1913 he toured major cities across Europe and the United States with a group of models, putting on catwalk shows.

Ballet Costumes

The popularity of exotic, eastern styles was partly inspired by the costumes worn by the famous Russian ballet, or Ballets Russes. Between 1909 and 1910, the company wowed audiences in Paris with their productions of Cléopâtre and Schéhérazade, set in the exotic locations of Egypt and Persia.

The dancers' flamboyant costumes were designed by Russian artist Léon Bakst. The bright colors and rich patterns captured people's imaginations after the previous decade's preference for muted, pastel shades.

The Twenties

Known as the *Roaring Twenties*, the decade that followed the war was a time of excess and partying—for the rich at least. Relieved to be alive, the young indulged in the latest dance crazes, listened to jazz on the radio, and went to the movies. The *Jazz Singer* (1927) was the first “talkie,” or film with sound. Before then, people watched silent movies with musical accompaniment.

The twenties saw greater freedom for women, as suffragettes’ protests finally paid off and many gained the vote for the first time. Married women also had the option of planning their families: Margaret Sanger had opened her first birth control clinic in the United States in 1916, and Marie Stopes opened Britain’s first in 1921.

Not everyone enjoyed the twenties. Some of the young men who had survived the war suffered a mental disorder known as shell shock, haunted by the horrors they had witnessed. And the twenties ended with the devastating stockmarket crash of 1929, which marked the beginning of a decade of economic depression.

Flappers!

“Flapper” was the name given to fun-loving young women in the twenties. Flappers wore shockingly short skirts—some just below the knee—and hid any womanly curves.

Tight underwear kept the chest flat, and drop waists hid the hips. Dresses, often in sheer fabrics, complemented dance moves: pleats gave freedom of movement, while fringing, beads, and tassels swayed with the beat.

During the daytime, the most fashionable young women wore comfortable twinsets (knitted tops and cardigans), like those designed by French couturier Coco Chanel.

Chanel’s clothes often had a nautical theme, and she popularized trousers for women. The boyish look was completed with shortcropped, or bobbed, hair, worn under a bell-shaped cloche hat.

For those who could not afford couture, ready-made clothing was becoming more widely available in department stores, while cheaper sewing machines made it possible for ordinary women to copy some high-fashion styles at home.

Accessories

Showy costume jewelry was popular in the twenties, including enormous fake gems, known as paste or rhinestones. Long strings of pearls sat well on a boyish flat chest and swung about to emphasize energetic dance moves.

Evening purses had tassels for the same reason. Smoking was taken up by the “fastest” young women and even this had its glamorous accessories—long, jewel-encrusted cigarette holders, as well as slim cigarette cases and lighters.

The Great Gatsby

The look for fashionable young men during the twenties was captured in the fictional character of Jay Gatsby, created by the American author F. Scott Fitzgerald for his novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Gatsby was wealthy, well connected, and dressed in lounge suits of pale linen, checked tweed, or soft, gray flannel.

The style for young men was relaxed. Suits had wide shoulders, roomy trousers, and modern zip flies instead of buttons. Informal shirts even had soft collars, instead of stiff, starched ones. Brogues were the usual footwear for daytime.

The Thirties

After the high-living twenties, the thirties were a sober time. Following the Wall Street Crash (1929), economies slumped and the Great Depression took hold, with millions finding themselves unemployed.

In the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal went some way toward providing help, but there was more trouble to come. Countries such as Germany and Japan began to build up their military power. The decade ended with the outbreak of World War II (1939–1945).

Fashion reflected the difficult times. Clothes were in subdued colors, such as black, gray, navy, and brown. Many families could not afford new clothes and managed with hand-me-downs. Designers responded to the depression by creating more ready-to-wear outfits in less costly fabrics, such as cotton and rayon.

Schiaparelli the Surrealist

One of the most outrageous designers of the decade was Italian-born Elsa Schiaparelli.

She was linked with the Surrealists, a group of artists who produced fantastical images, often putting ordinary objects in surprising places. Schiaparelli used Surrealist ideas in fashion. She collaborated with Spanish artist Salvador Dali on her unusual hat designs, which were shaped to look like an upturned shoe, a lamb chop, an ice-cream cone, and a bird!

Masculine Style

Not all women chose feminine dresses and skirts. Swedish actress Greta Garbo wore masculine tailored trousers with a belted trenchcoat and a beret. She also popularized the "slouch hat," after wearing it in *A Woman of Affairs* (1928).

Created by the Hollywood dresser Adrian, this outsize cloche was pulled down over the forehead. It influenced hat design throughout the thirties.

The Forties

The first half of the forties was dominated by World War II. The United States entered the war in 1941, following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. Peace finally came in 1945. Following the war, times remained hard.

In Britain, clothes rationing continued until 1948 and food rationing until 1954. Nevertheless, peace brought a kind of optimism. Millions of babies were born—the “baby boomers”—as servicemen returned to their families. There was also a wave of hopefulness in fashion, epitomized by the extravagant “New Look.”

Haute Couture in Hiding

During World War II, fashion took a back seat as all resources were needed for the war effort. Most women wore mass-produced, factory-made clothes in styles that used as little fabric as possible.

As in World War I, women's fashions became more practical and took on a military look. Many more women began to wear trousers, which gave greater freedom of movement and eliminated the need to wear stockings, which were in short supply.

Rationing

Countries involved in the war introduced rationing to protect stocks of rare resources. Supplies of food, clothing, and furniture were all controlled. Rationing worked on a system of coupons, with a certain number of coupons being given up for different items of clothing.

Everyone, rich or poor, received the same number of coupons. Clothes rationing began in the United Kingdom in 1941 and in the United States in 1942. People found inventive ways to get the most from their clothes.

Magazines ran articles suggesting how to adapt existing outfits. The fabric from a thirties' evening gown, for example, could go toward several new garments that used material more modestly. Government campaigns encouraged people to mend old clothes rather than throw them away. Finally, no coupons were required to buy secondhand clothes, so some people relied on others' castoffs to add new life to their wardrobes.

Wartime Children

Clothing for children was also rationed. Families who were short of money sold their coupons on the black market in exchange for cash. Many boys and girls learned to knit, and outgrown sweaters were unwound so the wool could be reused.

When Jewish children in concentration camps in German-occupied Europe outgrew or wore out their clothes, there were no replacements. Many went naked. Those children in hiding managed with whatever scraps of fabric their protectors could spare.

Norman Hartnell (1901–1979)

London-born Norman Hartnell showed his first collection in 1927. By 1938, he was official dressmaker to the British royal family. During the war, he began producing ready-to-wear clothes and also designed Utility clothing for the British Board of Trade. In the 1950s, he designed Queen Elizabeth II's wedding and coronation gowns. Her wedding dress was made of white satin and embroidered with more than twenty thousand pearls.

Occupied Paris

In June 1940, German soldiers marched into Paris, the fashion capital of the world. During the German occupation, over ninety French fashion houses were allowed to stay open, partly to dress the wives of high-ranking Nazi officers and also to bring in money from American customers. These fashion houses, which included Lucien Lelong, Jean Patou, and Pierre Balmain, were even allowed special fabric allowances.

Stage Costumes

Wartime entertainers did an important job of lifting people's spirits. They generally dressed in formal evening wear. Swing bands, for example, wore white tuxedos and black tie, while singers such as Vera Lynn wore long evening gowns. The styles of these clothes were unchanged from the designs of the thirties.

Designers Play Their Part

In the United States and Britain, designers helped to produce civilian clothing that was versatile, hard wearing, and did not use scarce resources. The American plan was known as L85, because clothes used only eighty-five percent as much fabric.

In Britain, the scheme was known as Utility clothing, and all garments bore the CC41 (Clothing Control 1941) label. Every aspect of the design of these clothes was controlled, down to the number of seams.

Working Women

Civilian women played a valuable role producing food on farms, working in factories, or running vital services such as buses and trains.

All of these jobs required sensible clothes, such as overalls, jodphurs, or dungarees. Headscarves were a practical alternative to hats, as they kept hair clean and out of the way of machinery. Many women cut their hair, reducing the need for hairpins, which were in limited supply.

After the War - Curves and Corsets

When the war ended, designers experimented with several different styles, but none really captured people's imaginations—until the launch of Christian Dior's "Corolle" collection in February 1947. Soon known as the *New Look*, it was not really new at all, drawing inspiration from the styles of the thirties.

However, it caused a stir because its full skirt required lavish quantities of fabric. At that time, clothes rationing had only just ended in the United States and was still in force in Britain.

Some people declared that it was wasteful and unpatriotic to wear the new style, and there were even demonstrations on the streets.

Hostility to the New Look did not last long. Many women found its romance and femininity irresistible after years of drab, sensible clothing. They were even willing to wear tightly laced corsets again in order to achieve the necessary wasp waist. The "natural" silhouette also required softly rounded shoulder and hip pads, which helped to emphasize the body's curves.

Christian Dior (1905–1957)

French designer Christian Dior began his fashion career aged thirty, selling catwalk sketches to newspapers. After working for designers Robert Piguet and Lucien Lelong, Dior opened his own couture house in 1947.

His first collection, the New Look, sealed his reputation and made his fortune. For the next ten years, Dior was at the forefront of design, producing structured, feminine styles. He was also known for his accessories, such as pearl choker necklaces and wide-brimmed hats.