



Style City: How London Became a Fashion Capital

By Robert O'Byrne

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One of Britain's greatest cultural achievements of the late 20th century was the establishment of British designer fashion. Robert O'Byrne explores this phenomenon from the mid-'70s, when designer fashion scarcely existed in Britain, to the new millennium, by which time London ranked alongside Paris, New York, and Milan as a world-class fashion capital. The book describes and illustrates all the key players and influences of British fashion in the period: not only the designers but also the music, the clubs, the parties, the amazing dressing-up tradition, and London itself. The language of fashion is visual, and this sumptuous book reflects that with evocative photographs by Norman Parkinson, David Bailey, Patrick Lichfield, Barry Lategan, and others, including iconic images such as the young Princess of Wales, Katherine Hamnett at 10 Downing Street wearing her "60 percent don't want Pershing" T-shirt, Margaret Thatcher in Aquascutum, and other rare shots from the designers' own archives.

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Editorial Review

Review

The English cultural historian O'Byrne (author of *After a Fashion: A History of Fashion in Ireland*) and London fashion promoter Worsley-Taylor (e. g., *London Fashion Week*, *London Design Collections*) follow how London rose to become a world-class fashion center starting in the mid 1970s and continues to maintain this position by a "superabundance of design originality." The story is told by highlighting particularly influential designers and events within phases of the pathway to the top; including the germinal factors, business sense and practices assimilated into the fashion world, and the crisis of the global recession in the latter 1980s which might have ended the developments. The many color photographs are instructive in supporting the author's account of the innovation and appeal of the London fashion industry. These photographs are accompanied by many others of leading designers and of celebrities such as Andy Warhol and Tina Turner who became interested in the developments and also took part in promotional events.

The most important germinal factor was Britain's punk rock. "Widely reviled, punk nevertheless touched some kind of nerve with the general public." Along with the general sense of excitement and promise it sent through the popular culture, punk rock (and its cousin New Wave music) showed that artistic success was possible without the imprimatur of the traditional media and cultural critics. The clothing of these musicians as well as their hair styles and performance behavior also generated a social milieu and anticipations new fashion styles could flourish in. Punk rock's worldwide popularity while keeping its association with England set the stage for the development of the fashion industry along new avenues. And punk rock sent the message that England was moving out of its image of staidness and propriety exemplified by its reputation as a financial center into the constantly changing and commercially important field of popular culture.

Familiar social phenomena especially from the media and entertainment fields and well-known celebrities are seen in new perspectives in being woven into the vibrant London fashion scene. The work is a pleasing combination of keen social history and art/coffee-table book. *Reviewers Bookshelf*

About the Author

Robert O'Byrne, previously Fashion Correspondent of the Irish Times, has spent many years at the heart of the fashion world, close to the people and events covered by this book. He is a frequent contributor to newspapers and journals in Britain, Ireland and the United States.

Users Review

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Mary Ehlers:

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