

it started with a beauty through fashion

By Rhiannon Bulley

Fashion and beauty have been intertwined since the day Eve ate an apple and realised that, in all her natural beauty, she was naked. UPI returns to these routes and takes a look at some of the designers who have influenced natural feminine beauty through their works of wearable art.

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," is perhaps the most famous quote ever uttered about beauty - one that has undoubtedly been spoken by every woman in that eternal pursuit, and every fashion designer who's ever challenged conventional expressions of beauty and unveiled new visions.

The pioneering impact of the latter community is made abundantly clear by the historical Darnell Collection, which houses thousands of garments from the 18th Century to the 1990s. The unending colour palates and shapes tell the tale of feminine identity, from modest times till today, when a thigh-scraping skirt barely raises an eye brow.

Over the years, Australian designers have also proved to be masters of beauty, challenging tradition and producing the previously unimaginable. Linda Jackson, Akira, George Gross and Harry Who all introduced fresh illustrations of beauty into the budding Australian fashion industry, while Aurelio Costarella and Gail Sorronda have invigorated the contemporary fashion scene.

Larger design houses, such as Cue, have become integral, ensuring the latest, international trends are accessible to the Australian woman, as she constructs and exhibits her own perception of feminine beauty.

By tapping into our complex identities and emphasising our hopes and desires, fashion has become more than Eve's means of covering herself; it has become the ultimate beauty tool - one which influences everything from our hair and makeup to our function and progress in society. Fashion is not only a mirror of the evolution of beauty, but a testimony to its eternal and powerful presence.

"Fashion is the essential outward expression of feminine beauty that permits us to turn our inner self out and announce our individual and communal perception of it."

Fig.

it started with a Fig Leaf

Chapters in the endless tale of fashion often imitate, but never cease to transcend.

From the transformation of restrictive 18th Century corsets into overtly sexual outdoorwear, to the recent reemergence of 1980s skyscraper shoulderpads, it's evident the iconic fashion moments continue to influence women's expression of beauty today.

So, let us take a look at some of the designers who helped define and redefine feminine beauty - not only as it related to fashion, but also the physical form, social roles and cultural expectations.



Pre 20th Century fashion, in all its embellished constraint, encapsulates how far the notion of feminine beauty has come.



Chanel gifted us with the daringness to pursue the power of men by wearing their clothing.



Dior's 1940s "New Look" liberated us from the soberness of war by extenuating the female form.



Dior preparing a model before a show.



Dior's recent spring/summer collection.

The innovative construction of Balenciaga's gowns and Madeleine Vionnet's augmentation of the bias cut gave elegance unrestrained movement.



Balenciaga's collections have offered dramatic and original extension to feminine proportions.

Madeleine Vionnet's 1930's draping dresses turned feminine beauty into something effortless and unconstrained.



"Conquering the austere and suppressive, fashion is our source of freedom from the banal."

Mary Quant's swinging 60s fashion flaunted bold aesthetics, reflecting the playful, rebellious attitude of the Baby Boomer generation.

From her rainbow of geometric clothing to her smear of dark eyeliner and bobcut, Quant introduced a look, which represented new beauty.

Designers like Mary Quant and Zandra Rhodes, inspired women to exhibit their creative attributes.



Zandra Rhodes 1980's dresses epitomised the dramatic imagination of the rock 'n' royalty decade.



"One woman who utilised fashion as a form of 'pretty power' was Georgiana the Duchess of Devonshire (18th Century).

She realised that by using style to emphasize feminine beauty she could influence and in doing so she not only revolutionised women's appearance but the political course of England".

'SYDNEY TRIP - MUST SEE'

The Darnell Collection shows material examples of feminine beauty's evolution and the designers who propelled it.

Currently housed in Sydney, the Darnell Collection includes over five thousand garments and accessories dating from 1795-1995.

It was originally bequeathed to Charlotte Smith by her American godmother Dorris Darnell,

who spent her life preserving these garments & the intimate stories within their linings. Today, Charlotte regularly exhibits the collection at The Fashion and Textile Gallery in Sydney. She is also the author of Dreaming of Dior, which tells the stories of one hundred and fifty gowns within the collection.



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Style 'on Cue' - As society has developed, so too have the expectations placed on feminine beauty. We want it to be instant, constant and statement-making from the office to the dinner party. Delivering 'real-time' fashion to thousands of Australian women each year, Cue Clothing Company continues to satisfy our great expectations...

It's 1968 and the children of war are now vivacious, young adults unrestricted by geographical and cultural barriers. The mod movement is in full swing in England and America and our creative senses have been awakened. We no longer want to simply appreciate art we want to look like it!

"A new daring vision of beauty had been born and was developing at a more rapid pace than ever before. Our constant outlet for this beauty relied on new outrageous fashion. Impatience plagued us and queuing for the international trends behind the rest of the world was no longer satisfactory.

Trend driven fashion was empowering feminine beauty and we wanted to dominate too." - Cue Clothing Company.

Cue opened its first store in Sydney's Strand Arcade in 1968 and with it a whole new world of choice. The company began producing up to the minute fashions, right here in Australia.

Founder, Rodney Levis, says, "by bringing in the latest looks from London with exclusive prints, we soon had a very enthusiastic clientele."

He recognised that the modern woman's 'beauty' relied on constantly stepping out in the latest fashion - 'on Cue'.

The innovative fashion house, which is still designed and for the most part produced in Australia, is now comprised of eighty-three stand-alone stores and sixty-five Myer stores. With new stock arriving weekly, Cue is still doing what it has always done best, keeping Australian women in vogue.

In today's age of Internet and jetsetters, up to the minute fashion is in even higher demand. We see the Paris runways and we want that little black dress as soon as the chic Parisian femme slithers out of it. We want to go to London in summer and wear their summer clothes not our previous summer's offerings.

Our fast paced world demands fashion not only flatters but also functions. This new stipulation on our clothing reflects how much feminine beauty has changed. Companies like Cue have evolved with us throughout that transformational process and they have both these essentials sewn down to a trendy T.

Generations of women have passed through Cue's doors. Entering into a world fashion forward clothing and departing with an outfit to make the heart sing, cars stop and dance floors light up.



CINEMA ADD - 1981



NEVA SPERLING - 1967
Cue knit dress



TONI QUINN - 1989
Former Miss Australia in her favourite Cue dress



FRAN CASEY & FRIENDS - 1974
Modeling Cue for the local paper



RUTH ELTON - 1977

Cue has produced and participated in many dramatic moments over the past forty-two years and for their fortieth birthday, decided to celebrate with the women who had been a defining part of them.

They put a call out to the women of Australia to share their Cue memories in a special edition book. These photographs of significant personal moments in history, are also a record of feminine beauty and how it has been transformed over the years.

The power of fashion to influence hair and make up is extremely clear and at times extremely bold too! Its ability to eliminate the boundaries of time and geography is blatant and inspiring. Cue's own brand history confirms fashion is, indeed, responsible for uniting the eclectic beauty of women and highlighting each of its landmark moments.

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CUE®



ALISON CORCORAN - 1986



JOELLE DEVIS - 1982 Cue jumpsuit

"Cue celebrates forty years of fashion and beauty trends..."

WIN

If you or someone you know has a love affair with the Cue label, be sure to enter this special prize draw! Two lucky UPI readers will have Cue's book, "You & Cue - The lives of a label, made in Australia", delivered to their door this winter. To enter, simply email your name, phone number and code #008 to: prizes@upmagazine.com.au before June 1/10



JOELLE DEVIS - 1982
Cue jumpsuit



JOSEPHINE LA FONTAINE - 1988 Cue polka dot dress

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AUSTRALIA'S Movers & Shakers

Australia's own fashion industry has always been ripe with innovation; our designers have consistently ensured our diversified homegrown beauty is equally as compelling as any other nations'.

UP! speaks with six avant-garde designers, who explain what beauty means to them and how their designs enhance it.



Akira

Aurelio Costarella

The Akira woman is: "Confident, ageless and individualistic." The final words of Sydney based designer **Akira Isogawa's** design philosophy, says it all, "Timeless beauty and femininity in my design is profound, in a way for the wearer to express their inner soul."

The Japanese-born designer brought his own culture to the Australian industry revolutionising the West by introducing us to the East. Our prescribed silhouettes began to embrace a foreign beauty through the designers compelling translations.

For Akira, "Feminine beauty is a strength all women possess and embrace. I do not try to focus on the expression of femininity while I design. I guess it comes out naturally." Akira's words sum up his own role and that of fashion perfectly, they both capture something natural and cement it into a form that can be touched and experienced. "Fashion supports women to feel confident by allowing them to express their femininity rather than suppress it." Akira will continue to inspire women to wear their beauty proudly on their sleeves.

The Aurelio Costarella woman is: "Honest, beautiful & sincere." **Aurelio Costarella's** column of structured silk stand permanent and powerful overarching trends and rendering themselves still in a spellbinding presence.

For nine years, the Western Australian based designer has been carving women into glorious goddesses and statement sirens.

The contemporary couture style label's cascading frills and sculptural pillars emanate an exulted form of prevailing elegance that reflects both the modern strength and primal innocence of feminine beauty.

Costarella describes his role in defining this elusive quality as complimentary. "I make desirable and beautiful pieces of clothing."

Pieces of clothing that are inspired by the women he encounters, "the women that make an impression on me may be childhood friends or strangers passing me on the street." Either way, through his clothing, a transient encounter with beauty becomes a timeless masterpiece.

The George Gross woman is: "Intelligent, confident & happy." One half of Australia's most renowned fashion partnerships, **George Gross and Harry Who**, his name has spanned thirty-six years of the Australian Fashion Industry. Their illustrious partnership has manifested itself as three separate labels, **George Gross, Harry Who** and **G2** by George Gross. As an individual designer, George has built a rapport with women through his glamorous evening and daywear.

"From fun casual to quietly elegant to drop dead glamorous, he makes sure feminine beauty is extenuated no matter what the circumstance.

Born from, "a lifetime love of female company," George Gross's designs ensure love and appreciation of their beauty is reflected in the clothes a woman wears.



Gail Sorronda



George Gross



Harry Who

The Gail Sorronda woman is: "Mysterious, Curious & Bi-Polar." Gail Reid, who designs under Sorronda, (her mothers maiden name), entered the Australian industry as an inspired graduate from Queensland University of Technology in 2005. Her graduate collection, 'Angel's at my table,' introduced an entirely fresh aesthetic. Gail endlessly experiments and challenges the notion of feminine beauty.

For Gail, feminine beauty is an element that captivates both sexes without being confrontational. "Fashion's role is redefining the contemporary version of beauty. It challenges perceptions, but later becomes an accessible concept. I'm trying to challenge perceptions through innovation." Gail's romantically dark designs obscure the feminine silhouette with embellishment and her collections reek with abstract mystery. Dancing with the devil whilst lining with the divine, defying current rationale and opting for something completely unexpected - a feather or flourish of beading.

The Harry Who woman is: "Sexy, Fun & Confident." Harry Who, the other half of the pair is equally respected for his ability to transpose inner beauty into an exterior through his clothing. For him, "Fashion is the outlet women use to express their own personal beauty as well as their own creativity and taste."

His ability to harness women's desire to communicate this has seen the creation of many "different looks that allow the expression of their style and beauty, by using the best quality fabrics and ensuring a perfect fit." He has enhanced physical form and inner loveliness through his luxurious, tailored, suiting & dresses.

He too shares his partner's appreciation for women, "I have been surrounded by beautiful women throughout my life that constantly inspire me." These qualities have led to entire wardrobes that captivate their inspiration. George Gross and Harry Who's designs are a testimony to the power of feminine beauty to motivate and transfigure in a material form.

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AUSTRALIA'S Movers & Shakers



The Linda Jackson woman is: "happy, compassionate and adventurous." Linda Jackson's career in fashion went hand in hand with art, "Bush couture was created to combine haute couture with tribal costume and the beauty of the Australian bush." Her magnificent garments were rich canvases of colour and texture that draped the body in natural beauty.

Linda Jackson

Linda Jackson's career, beginning in the 1970's, has spanned fashion and art exhibitions from London to Tokyo, with every state of Australian intervening between.

Her designs captured a generation and inspired them to let their inner rainbow of beauty be reflected through their clothing. "What a fabulous object women will be," sums up Linda's inspiration for her ornamentation of their silhouette.

Linda truly took fashion back to Eve, "She will borrow her line from the natural elements, from all that flows and flies."

It was through this mantra of Linda's designs that feminine beauty did indeed return to its natural state and flow like a river and fly like a bird, on the wings of effeminate and fantastical painted garments.

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Hidden away in a beautiful Windsor-based Queenslander is an enchanted wonderland of silks, lace, and ribbon trimmings. This creative nook, being the design studio for MXM Couture, has lead to many women to enjoy a Cinderella moment. The fairy godmothers behind the magic are designers Michelle and Margaret Williams (a.k.a. MXM).

Usually tucked behind antique singer sewing machines, the identical twins are completely lovable in all their quirkiness and humble charm. Modelling wild and wonderful nests of strawberry blonde hair, the Williams sisters absentmindedly finish each others' sentences. Their nymph-like quality is clearly transposed into their fantastical dresses, and their modesty is utterly refreshing. Margaret and Michelle are rather uncharacteristic of the modern world of fashion, which can be pretentious and cutting at times.

The designers taught themselves to sew at the age of twelve, before entering into the fashion world professionally at seventeen. Each sister worked separately under various bridal wear designers and quickly went on to win a number of prestigious awards. In 1998, they took a leap of faith and kicked off their own label, MXM Couture. "We played together as kids and we are still playing together," explains Margaret. "We used to make

unique character. Ultimately, it's the person in the gown who makes it look its most beautiful."

One of MXM's favourite challenges was designing a piece for a young woman who had tattoos on her upper body. The sisters managed to create a stunning gown that weaved in out of the lines of the tattoos, framing the client like a work of art.

While the MXM sisters chatter away like little birds, they are also great listeners and incredibly observant. Their talent lies in their ability to gauge clients as much as it does in their creative abilities. "You learn so much from the way a woman carries herself, to how loud or often she speaks," explains Margaret. Their luxurious hand dyed and beaded silks hold a transformative power. The structural components and embellishment of their garments are like sculptures, steeped in a rich tradition of artistic techniques. When asked about their unique design methods, the sisters only smile and say, "We can't tell you that! It's a secret! It's our own art form...we can't give it away!"

However, it's quite clear; the key ingredient that make the motto, "Always give 110%". As Michelle puts it, "We were bought up with the attitude of if you are going to do it, do it properly or not at all." Both agree that the day work feels

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all our clothes. If we wanted something we would just sit down and figure out how to create it."

Today, the twins' design ethic is still very much as it was when they first started out. "We work directly from the body, draping and pinning," says Michelle. "It's about perfecting the body and you can't do that on a mannequin. Our designs are far more individual-oriented than that."

The walls of their studio are testament to their approach, being covered in photographs of women (from all walks of life) looking like royalty in gowns that reflect their unique bodies and personalities.

These days, the MXM team focuses primarily on bridal couture. However, over the years they have created masterpieces for a variety of occasions, including Miss World competitions and high school formals.

Having unique design styles, Margaret and Michelle prefer to cater for different clients. "We bounce off each other and strengthen the other's weaknesses but ultimately we work separately," says Margaret, who is known for her intricate detailing. Michelle is the more structurally-oriented designer of the two.

Both agree the most important stylistic influence is the client. "It's about bringing out their personality, not creating it. Each design is very personal and we work with the client to ensure the dress takes on their

"It's about bringing out their personality, not creating it."

like a chore they will stop. But they don't see that day arriving anytime soon. "For us, designing is a continuous path of growth." And, whilst MXM's designs have evolved into textile extravaganzas, the sisters egos remain as small as the individual beads on their gowns.



It is plain from the moment you set foot in their simple studio, with chickens and a vegetable garden out the back, Margaret and Michelle Williams are not in fashion design for the glory. Rather, they've immersed themselves in the world of couture because, quite simply, it's what they love. Dressmaking is their bliss.

Our greatest achievements...

Michelle: Making a career out of what I love to do, and never losing inspiration.

Margaret: continuing to have a fantastic working relationship with my sister after 11 years in business.