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FASHION INSIGHTS
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THE ART OF DATING FASHION

"I want people to see the dress, but focus on the woman."
—Vera Wang



INTRODUCTION



In a world where fast fashion dominates the landscape, vintage fashion offers a timeless alternative that exudes charm, history, and sustainability. However, dating vintage fashion—determining the era from which a garment originates—requires a keen eye and a bit of detective work.

This article delves into the art of dating vintage fashion, providing tips and insights to help you unlock the secrets of bygone eras.

UNDERSTANDING FASHION ERAS

Before delving into the specifics of dating vintage clothing, it's crucial to familiarize yourself with the key characteristics of different fashion eras. Each decade has its distinct style, influenced by cultural, social, and technological changes.



THE FASHION ERAS

1920s: The Roaring Twenties were marked by flapper dresses, dropped waists, and beaded embellishments. The silhouette was straight and loose, reflecting the era's liberation from corsetry.

1930s: The Great Depression influenced more conservative styles with bias cuts, fitted waists, and longer hemlines. Evening wear featured glamorous fabrics like silk and satin.

1940s: World War II brought about utilitarian fashion with simple, practical designs. Fabrics were often rationed, leading to more austere, tailored silhouettes. Post-war, Christian Dior's "New Look" revolutionized fashion with cinched waists and full skirts.

1950s: This decade celebrated femininity with hourglass silhouettes, full skirts, and elegant evening wear. Poodle skirts, rockabilly styles, and cardigans were also popular.

1960s: The Swinging Sixties embraced bold colours, geometric prints, and mod styles. Miniskirts, shift dresses, and go-go boots defined the era.

1970s: Known for its eclectic mix, the Seventies featured everything from bohemian maxi dresses and peasant blouses to disco-inspired jumpsuits and platform shoes.

1980s: The Eighties were all about excess, with power suits, bold shoulders, neon colours , and extravagant accessories. Think Madonna, Michael Jackson, and "Dynasty."

1990s: The Nineties brought grunge, minimalism, and athleisure to the forefront. Flannel shirts, slip dresses, and oversized denim defined the decade.

KEY INDICATORS

FOR DATING VINTAGE FASHION

1. Labels and Tags: Clothing labels can provide valuable information. Look for brand names, union labels, and "Made in" tags. The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) tag, for example, changed designs over the years, offering clues to the garment's age.

2. Construction Techniques: Examine the garment's construction. Hand-stitched seams, metal zippers (as opposed to plastic), and side snaps or hooks indicate an older piece. Overlock serging is typically a post-1960s technique.

3. Fabric and Prints: Fabrics and prints can be era-specific. For instance, rayon was popular in the 1930s and 1940s, while polyester became ubiquitous in the 1970s. Similarly, certain prints like paisley were trendy in specific decades.

4. Silhouette and Design Details: The garment's silhouette and design details can also offer hints. The dropped waist of the 1920s, the padded shoulders of the 1980s, and the empire waist of the Regency-inspired 1960s are all tell-tale signs of their respective eras.

5. Buttons and Closures: The style and material of buttons and closures can help date a piece. Bakelite buttons were popular in the 1930s and 1940s, while plastic became more common post-1950s.

6. Fashion Magazines and Catalogues: Vintage fashion magazines and catalogues can be invaluable resources. They provide visual references and context, helping you compare and contrast styles.

VINTAGE FASHION GUILD

AN INDISPENSABLE RESOURCE

For those serious about dating vintage fashion, the Vintage Fashion Guild (VFG) website is an invaluable resource. The VFG offers a comprehensive database of designer information, including detailed histories and images of labels, which can be instrumental in identifying and dating garments. Their Label Resource section is particularly helpful for recognizing and verifying designer labels, union tags, and manufacturer markings.

Additionally, the VFG hosts public forums open to non-members, where enthusiasts can seek assistance with label and style identification. Registration is free, making it an accessible tool for anyone looking to deepen their understanding of vintage fashion.

THE JOY OF THE HUNT

Dating vintage fashion is not just about identifying a garment's age; it's about uncovering its story. Each piece of vintage clothing carries a history, a glimpse into the life and times of the era it represents. The thrill of the hunt, the excitement of discovery, and the satisfaction of wearing a unique piece make vintage fashion a truly rewarding pursuit.

As you hone your skills in dating vintage fashion, you'll develop a deeper appreciation for the craftsmanship, design, and cultural significance of these timeless garments. Whether you're a seasoned collector or a curious newcomer, the art of dating vintage fashion offers endless opportunities for exploration and expression.

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VINTAGE COUTURE

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