

Exclusive Excerpt

# 70 YEARS of the QUEEN'S STYLE

A new book explores the secrets behind Queen Elizabeth's classic elegance, from her historic coronation gown to her signature hats

by MONIQUE JESSEN

The day then-Princess Elizabeth returned home from Kenya in February 1952 immediately following the death of her father, King George VI, fashion and duty became indelibly intertwined. Separated from her luggage, the Queen had no suitable mourning outfit with her, resulting in a delay on the tarmac before the new Queen, just 25 years old, could face the waiting media. From that moment on, the Queen would painstakingly ensure that her every outfit—from the top of her famous hats to the bottom of her sensible shoes—was prepared in advance and perfectly matched to the occasion. “The Queen shows us how she feels through her clothing,” says Bethan Holt, author of the new book *The Queen: 70 Years of Majestic Style*. “Once you delve beneath the surface a little bit, you can see what an incredible amount of research and thought has gone into creating her iconic looks.”

With help from a series of famed designers and dressers—including her current right-hand woman Angela Kelly—the Queen has curated a style that is both timeless and memorable. In 2016 she wore a neon green ensemble for her 90th birthday, inspiring the trending #neonat90 hashtag and setting sales of neon soaring. “So many people respected her for that—it’s great that as a nonagenarian, she can still influence fashion,” says Holt. The Queen has also long modeled a commitment to eco-conscious style: Her pearl necklaces and love of Launer handbags are inherited from the Queen Mother, and her bright jackets and matching hats are reworn or up-cycled from decade to decade. “What’s so clever about her is that she acknowledges changes in fashion and does what she can to incorporate them,” says Holt, “while also remaining conscious that she has to look timeless. It’s quite a delicate balance.” Here, in an exclusive excerpt from her new book, Holt shares the stories behind some of her Majesty’s most memorable looks.







+ 1953 +

## A Princess Becomes a Queen

*After years of loyal service, the Queen honored [Norman] Hartnell with a unique commission—creating her coronation gown. “My mind was teeming with heraldic and floral ideas... everything heavenly that might be embroidered upon such a dress,” Hartnell wrote. It was decided that instead of only incorporating emblems of the different nations of the United Kingdom, the gown’s embroidery should represent all of the territories over which the Queen would now reign, an idea that would result in an intricate scalloped pattern and shimmering palette of greens, pinks and yellows achieved using silk threads, pearls, diamonds, amethysts, crystals and sequins. It took nine weeks, six embroiderers and 3,000 hours to complete. To create the full-skirted shape, the dress was lined in taffeta and padded with three layers of horsehair crinoline, which made it incredibly warm and heavy; the Queen later said that it was akin to wearing a radiator.*

GETTY IMAGES



+ 1953 +

# On Tour

*Looking back at pictures of the Queen from the 1950s with the rose-tinted glasses of nostalgia, she looks just as impeccably elegant as Norman Hartnell described, beginning to shape a look that was at once striking and sophisticated but still appropriate to her role.*

*When Christian Dior showed a collection with skirts 16 in. from the ground and tops without corsetry ahead of Elizabeth II's long-planned Commonwealth tour in 1953, the Daily Sketch newspaper declared that there would be "no Dior hemline rubbish for the Queen when she goes on her Commonwealth tour." Hartnell and [Hardy] Amies created between 100 and 150 outfits between them for the tour, which would see the Queen visit Bermuda, Jamaica, Fiji, Tonga, New Zealand, Australia, the Cocos Islands, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Aden (now part of Yemen), Uganda, Malta and Gibraltar. The reality of this tour was grueling. Elizabeth and Philip left their small children at home for six months, and on the Australian leg of the journey, the party traveled an average of 230 miles each day. But the images that survive from the voyage look romantically glamorous; the beautifully dressed young Queen and her handsome husband against all manner of exciting backdrops.*

**'She has a huge respect for fashion and takes her job incredibly seriously, and that's why she has become the style icon that she is today'**

—BETHAN HOLT



HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES





FROM TOP: ANWAR HUSSEIN/  
GETTY IMAGES; HULTON  
ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES



+ 1979 +

## Royal Diplomacy

Throughout her reign, the Queen and other members of the royal family have been deployed on “charm offensives” to strategically important countries. Her Majesty’s trip to the Middle East in 1979 was designed to enhance relations with nations that formed one of the U.K.’s most significant export markets and were its source of oil. Against this high-stakes backdrop, it was important for the Queen’s clothing to be pitch-perfect and adhere to the area’s custom of modest dressing. The double act of Hardy Amies and Frederick Fox created a series of covered-up looks for Her Majesty. The Queen’s long dresses did not go to waste after this tour — they were shortened and worn at Royal Ascot.

+ 1969 +

## Key Moment in History

The investiture of Prince Charles as the Prince of Wales was a moment that symbolized one of the central challenges of the Queen’s reign: how to meld history with modernity. On this occasion, fashion played a vital role in achieving this finest of balances. Norman Hartnell created a strikingly simple pale yellow shift dress and coat with a stand-up collar in a recognizably ’60s style, while milliner Simone Mirman crafted an unusual Tudor-style cap covered entirely in pearls and bugle beads. “That was a huge labor of love, because everything was done by hand; it took hours and hours and hours,” remembers Mirman’s daughter Sophie. Hartnell called it the Queen’s “medieval helmet,” while Cecil Beaton wrote a letter of congratulations, saying that the hat was “absolutely perfect for the setting.”





+ 2011 +

# A Royal Wedding

Optimism and joy radiated from the outfit worn by the Queen to the wedding of the future king, Prince William, and his university sweetheart, Catherine Middleton. After a 10-year romance, Her Majesty's choice of color and details seemed to symbolize the hope that this union gave for the future of the monarchy. Angela Kelly, the Queen's dresser, created the primrose yellow dress, matching coat and rose-adorned hat. She added beading and tucks around the neckline to create a sun-ray effect. Later that year Her Majesty repurposed her wedding look as a diplomatic fashion statement when she wore the dress to church in Australia—where yellow is a national color.



+ 1952 +

# Style Influencer

The first decade of Her Majesty's reign was a time filled with experimental and trendsetting evening wear. Months after ascending the throne, in October 1952, the Queen caused a sensation when she arrived at the Empire Theatre in Leicester Square for a royal viewing of the musical comedy *Because You're Mine*. Pictures of a glamorous Elizabeth II wearing Norman Hartnell's black-and-white blazer-style gown appeared in almost every magazine and newspaper the following day, with manufacturers rushing to make copies of the dress as quickly as possible. Even those on a budget could emulate Her Majesty after a paper pattern was produced. The dress, dubbed the Magpie, was never worn again.

**'The 1950s were an incredible time for the Queen's style. She wore the trend of that era so beautifully'**

—BETHAN HOLT



# HATS OFF TO HER MAJESTY

*No one loves an eye-catching topper more than the Queen! Here, some of her most notable styles*



1951 1954 1956 1958 ➔



1960 1965 1966 1968 ➔



1975 1977 1978 1984 ➔



1986 1988 1990 1991 ➔



1999 2001 2003 2005 ➔



2010 2012 2016 2021

FIRST ROW, FROM LEFT: INTERCONTINENTAL/AP/GETTY IMAGES; BETTMANN ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; PA IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES(2); SECOND ROW: CAMERA PRESS/REDFERX; KONRAD GIEHR/PICTURE ALLIANCE/GETTY IMAGES; JOHN READER/ILN/CAMERA PRESS/REDFERX; GEORGE FRESTON/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; AP/SHUTTERSTOCK; THIRD ROW: SERGE LEMOINE/GETTY IMAGES; ANWAR HUSSEIN/GETTY IMAGES; SHUTTERSTOCK; JOHN SHELLEY COLLECTION/AVAILON/GETTY IMAGES(2); FOURTH ROW: PETER KEMP/AP/SHUTTERSTOCK; TIM GRAHAM PHOTO LIBRARY/GETTY IMAGES(3); MARTIN KEENE/PA IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES; UK PRESS/GETTY IMAGES; KIRSTY WIGGLESWORTH/AF/PA/GETTY IMAGES; ANWAR HUSSEIN COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS JACKSON/GETTY IMAGES; SIXTH ROW: JOHN STILLWELL/GETTY IMAGES; IN PICTURES LTD./CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES; GETTY IMAGES; MAX MUMBY/INDIGO/GETTY IMAGES(2)





+ 1999 +

## High Glamour

*There was a witty touch to many of the evening looks worn by the Queen during the '80s and '90s. In November 1999, the Queen wore one of her most famous evening dresses of all time at the Royal Variety Performance in Birmingham. Dubbed the Harlequin dress, a gold chevron-striped skirt was topped with a sequined, diamond-patterned bodice. The dress's creator Karl-Ludwig Rehse told the Daily Telegraph that he was "overwhelmed" by the reaction to his design. "People seemed to be thrilled at how she looked. She was stunning," he said. "She's like all ladies; she'll go for something new. She's fun to work with and very knowledgeable about fabrics. She knows how the clothes have to behave—how they have to move."*

FROM LEFT: MAX MUMBY/INDIGO/GETTY IMAGES; SERGE LEMOINE/GETTY IMAGES; ANWAR HUSSEIN/GETTY IMAGES





‘She does have a natural sophistication to her. She looks like she could be on a designer’s mood board’

— BETHAN HOLT



+ 1988 +

## The Fashion Muse

In February 2021 Ian Griffiths at Max Mara paid tribute to the Queen with his autumn/winter 2021 show, basing his designs on Elizabeth II’s off-duty ensembles. “I think the Queen is the ne plus ultra of authentic British style, and what I love about that style is that, despite any notions we might have about class divisions, it’s a completely democratic look,” he explains. “In lockdown, I wore my walking boots, waxed jacket, quilted gilet, tatter-sall-check shirt and tweed cap every day, and it struck me on our daily dog walks that I wasn’t alone: just about everyone else was wearing variations on the same look. It looks good on anyone, but no one does it better than the Queen.” Why do these outfits resonate? “She looks completely at ease in what she’s wearing, unselfconscious and nonchalant,” he observes, “and I’ve always thought that’s the key to looking good.”

+ 1979 +

## Safari Chic

Like many women, Elizabeth had her first taste of wearing trousers during the Second World War, when she donned them in her job as a mechanic with the Auxiliary Territorial Service, not as a fashion statement but as part of her practical khaki uniform. Sightings of the Queen in trousers were few and far between, however, as she preferred to maintain the romantic view of the monarchy forged by her mother with her Norman Hartnell gowns and rose-tinted Cecil Beaton portraits. Aside from a visit to a mine in Fife in 1958, where she gamely wore a protective boiler suit, the Queen wasn’t pictured wearing trousers again until 1970 when she and Prince Philip took part in a reenactment of Captain Cook’s landing in New Zealand to mark the 200th anniversary of his historic achievement. Nine years later the sovereign was seen wearing trousers again on safari in Zambia. Here she looked elegant in beige pants and a gold, crimson and blue patterned cream-silk blouse, finished off with a pair of sunglasses.



**A CELEBRATION OF HER STYLE**  
Excerpted from *The Queen: 70 Years of Majestic Style*, copyright © 2022 by Bethan Holt, with permission from Ryland Peters & Small.