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# FASHION BRANDS

3RD EDITION

BRANDING STYLE FROM  
ARMANI TO ZARA

MARK TUNGATE



KoganPage

THIRD EDITION



# **Fashion Brands**

Branding style  
from Armani  
to Zara

Mark Tungate



**KoganPage**

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*For my sister, whose fashion icons are  
Audrey Hepburn and The Ramones –  
and who somehow manages to combine the two.*

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# PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

*The writer, the book and the wardrobe.*

I never expected *Fashion Brands* to reach three editions.

For me, it was a piece of journalism, a snapshot of an industry at a certain period.

It was also an exploration of a business I knew very little about at the time. The original idea was to plunge into Paris – my new home, a city I was overjoyed to find myself living in but only just starting to discover – and find out why it considered itself ‘the capital of fashion’.

Little did I know that my quest would take me to Milan, New York, Hong Kong – and back to London. Nor did I know that I would be asked to revisit the text, not once, but twice.

I won’t pretend that I found it easy. Writing a book is a long, stressful, exhausting business. The hero of Stephen King’s *Misery* always lights a cigarette when he’s finished a manuscript. Personally, I always feel like closing the blinds and sleeping for about a week.

You may think me pretentious for comparing myself to an author of fiction. But I can’t help thinking of my books as stories, with descriptions, intriguing characters and a sort of narrative. In a conventional story, the central character emerges from his experiences changed in some way. When I write my books, that person is usually me.

The first edition of *Fashion Brands* was a success in its own modest way, and it changed my life. It led to freelance work with WGSN, the trend forecasting company. Brands sought me out for advice and copywriting jobs. Students wrote to me asking for help with their theses. I was invited to speak at conferences and universities.

And of course it led to four subsequent books. My career since my early 30s has been shaped in part by *Fashion Brands*. Which is why it always feels odd to go back to it. For one thing there’s the tone of the book: tentative, slightly naïve, somewhat apologetic. Today I’m almost part of the fashion business – or at least, I have more legitimacy in the field than I did back then. No doubt I’d adopt a more knowing posture now. Which would be a shame, because I think the reason students enjoy this book so much is that I sound a lot like them.

But there you have it: the book is still popular and the editor wants an update. You don’t update novels; you can’t update journalism; but apparently it’s ok to update a book about fashion.

So how to go about the task? Some of you may feel that I should have simply rewritten the whole book. But then it wouldn’t be *this* book, it would be another one. There were practical considerations, too: the leading names in fashion are hardly the most accessible beings on earth; I couldn’t see myself calling all of them to ask if I



could re-interview them. So my favourite quotes are still here, intact and largely unedited.

I also found that, despite the book's very last sentence, many aspects of fashion branding remained unchanged. Its need to create fantasy worlds, its reliance on celebrities, its ability to stimulate demand by manufacturing trends, even its preference for glossy magazines over alternative media.

There were new matters to address, however. At the time of the first edition there was no Facebook, or Twitter – or iPhone or iPad. I also wanted to talk about the increasing importance of children's fashion, something I've grown acutely aware of since becoming a father a year ago. In the end, I came up with what seemed to be the ideal approach. I decided to treat the book like a wardrobe.

I threw out certain items that were far too moth-eaten or out of date to be seen again. I kept what I considered to be timeless pieces, or those that had aged reasonably well. And I went out and replenished the whole with a few sprightly new additions.

I'll admit the result is something of a patchwork: more of an eccentric, curated collection than a work of sleek modernity. But I like to think that it is still relevant. And what's more, it's still the original book, the one I finished with a sigh very late one night, wondering if it would be of any help to anyone.

Turned out, it was. I hope it still is.

# Introduction

*You don't buy clothes – you buy an identity.*

**T**he model struts towards the battery of cameras, profile held slightly aloft, walking with the curious avian gait that has evolved to flatter the lines of her dress. She does not spare a glance for us mere mortals in the wings; her attention is utterly focused on the arsenal of lenses at the end of the catwalk, which will whirl her image into the global maelstrom of the media barely an instant after she has turned away.

She pauses at the end of her purposeful march, a thigh thrust forward, a hand on a jutting hip, smiling at last as the flashes crackle around her like summer lightning. When she has given her audience what they came for, she swivels imperiously, flinging a contemptuous vestige of inaccessibility in their direction, before marching just as determinedly back to the oxygen-starved planet where only models, fashion designers and billionaires live.

For many consumers, the model's short stroll is the first image that springs to mind at the mention of the word 'fashion'. The runway show – with its combination of creativity, glamour and artifice – is one of the elements that drive us, again and again, to buy clothes we don't really need. It's difficult to think of an industry that does not have recourse to marketing in one form or another, but only fashion has such an overbearing reliance on it. When clothes leave the factories where they are made, they are merely 'garments' or 'apparel'. Only when the marketers get hold of them do they magically become 'fashion'.

There is nothing trivial about fashion. Although there is little consensus on the figure, it is estimated that the amount spent on clothing, footwear and accessories around the world tops US\$1 trillion a year. According to Bain & Company, the global luxury goods market is currently worth US\$240 billion. Fashion and leather goods account for a large proportion of the sector, alongside perfumes and cosmetics sold under the licensed names of fashion designers. Watches and jewellery take care of the rest. This vast, resilient industry is driven by a number of highly sophisticated marketing and branding techniques, which are well worth dissecting.

And it would be foolish of us to underestimate the importance of fashion in society. Clothes and accessories are expressions of how we feel, how we see ourselves – and how we wish to be treated by others. During my interview with the fashion photographer Vincent Peters (who has taken pictures of some of the most gorgeous people in the world, wearing some of the most expensive clothes), he said, 'Fashion is too prevalent to be considered trivial. Even when you say you're not interested in fashion, you've been forced to confront it. Fashion is everywhere. What you choose to wear or not to wear has become a political statement. You don't buy clothes – you buy an identity.'

This identity is linked to brand values that have been communicated via marketing.

Are you elegant, flighty, debonair, streetwise, intellectual, sexy ... or all of the above, depending on your mood? Don't worry: we've got the outfit to match.

But it's not only the outfit that is on offer. Over the past decade or so, fashion has stolen into every corner of the urban landscape. Our mobile phones, our cars, our kitchens, our choice of media and the places where we meet our friends – these, too, have become subject to the vagaries of fashion. It's not enough to wear the clothes; you have to don the lifestyle, too. Fashion brands have encouraged this development by adding their names to a wide range of objects, fulfilling every imaginable function, and selling them in stores that resemble theme parks.

People will go to extreme lengths to consume fashion. Not so long ago, there was a clutch of articles about kids being mugged – even killed – for their sports shoes. While I was researching this book, an uncharacteristically sensationalist article in the French newspaper *Le Figaro* suggested that teenage girls were selling their bodies to raise enough cash to satisfy their addiction to fashion. On a less dramatic scale, few teenagers are unaware of the importance of the right brand, in the right colour, worn in the right way. And, as we're all teenagers these days, adults are becoming just as obsessive. The caprices of fashion are both exasperating and alluring. Its alchemy is mysterious. Most people, even if they refuse to be seduced by it, are intrigued by fashion.

## **A different view**

When I started working on this project, I could make no claims to being an expert. I was just your average trade hack, writing about complex but faintly geeky subjects such as marketing and the media.

My non-fashion background proved advantageous. I could ask naïve questions that a fashion journalist might not have dared to pose for fear of undermining their credibility. I was not in the pay of the industry I was analysing (unlike glossy magazine journalists, who are in thrall to their advertisers), so I could afford to be objective. My distance from the subject enabled me to regard it with a certain irony. I admit to the occasional smirk.

This was not an easy book to research. The fashion industry, as you might expect, can be haughty and insular, and suspicious of outsiders. It was unlikely to open its arms to a journalist who wanted to deconstruct its marketing strategies. The luxury brands, particularly, are built like chateaux, their elegant façades masking impressive battlements. At first I thought the public relations people working at brands such as Chanel and Louis Vuitton were merely dismissive. I was wrong – they were being tactical. Their inaccessibility is part and parcel of their image.

One thing is certain: fashion, even at the top end of the scale, is increasingly about big business. Designers are admirably creative people, but they work for an ever-shrinking number of global conglomerates. Under-performing brands are sold without a hint of remorse, no matter how talented and artistic the people behind them might be. The clothes a designer sends out on to the runway are worthless unless they increase sales of handbags, sunglasses and perfume. Thus, marketing has taken on a crucial significance, and no designer can afford to neglect it.

The designers are not always at ease with this situation. Lanvin designer Alber Elbaz – a man as softly spoken as he is sharply witty – relates an interesting anecdote. Elbaz learnt his craft working for the legendary American designer Geoffrey Beene. One day, Beene asked the young Alber what he thought of a particular dress. ‘It’s very commercial,’ Elbaz opined. Beene took him gently aside and said, ‘Alber, you must *never* say a dress is commercial. You must say it is *desirable*.’

Until recently, I considered myself almost immune to brands and their influence. I was certainly suspicious of designer brands that charged a fortune for their labels. I was convinced that their clothes were no better than those of any chain store. I scoffed when a well-known fashion journalist told me during the Paris collections, ‘I have two jackets with me, one from Zara and one from Martin Margiela. The Margiela jacket was probably five times the price of the Zara one – but I don’t mind, because I like what Margiela stands for.’

Working on this book enhanced my respect for fashion designers, past and present. There cannot be many creative professions in which you are expected to prove your talent with a large body of work at least every six months. In addition, many designers are involved not only with their own collections but also with those of other brands. Certainly, they have large design teams working alongside them – to imagine otherwise would be absurd – but they are the ones who take the flack if the press reception is chilly.

For those outside the industry, it’s probably easier to be cynical about fashion than it is to be admiring. As my research progressed, I found that I bounced like a pinball from one mindset to the other. I was surprised that many of the people involved in fashion marketing – the photographers, the art directors, the event organizers – retained a sense of humour about it. Yet they enjoyed grappling with an increasingly intellectual challenge. Apart from the stores they are sold in – and the bags we carry them home in – clothes have no packaging. They just sit on shelves, waiting mutely to be judged on their own appearance. All the packaging has to be done externally; otherwise, how would we know that this particular shirt represents a whole range of emotions and messages that we are supposed to be buying into?

Fashion branding may be an ephemeral business, but it is a complex and endlessly fascinating one. How does one turn a mere ‘garment’ into an object with seemingly mystical transformative powers? Well, let’s hear it from the experts.

*Author’s Note:* This book was originally written in 2005, with new editions in 2008 and 2012. The statistics and job titles quoted date from the period when the interviews and research were conducted. All quotes were taken from original interviews or conferences, unless otherwise stated in the text.

# 01

## A history of seduction

*Fashion is a factory that manufactures desire.*

Everything began in Paris. Later we'll turn to New York and Milan, to London and Tokyo, but most experts agree that fashion, as we know it today, was born in the French capital.

From the days when the couturier Worth designed dresses for Empress Eugénie, the wife of Napoleon III, to the final episode of *Sex and the City* – surely the most fashion-conscious television series of recent times – Paris has been a byword for style. As Bruno Remaury, social anthropologist and lecturer at the Institut Français de la Mode, the leading French fashion school, points out, 'The very word "fashion" comes from the French: *façon* means to work in a certain manner, and *travaux à façon* is the traditional French term for dressmaking.'

Paris still perspires fashion. On the Right Bank, historically the commercial heart of the city, the fashion zone opens like a jewelled fan from the fulcrum of the Musée de la Mode, housed in a wing of the Louvre. It takes in the glittering boutiques along the Rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré (also home to the French edition of *Vogue*), the über-hip designer outlet Colette, the department stores of Printemps and Galeries Lafayette, and several branches of the hyper-successful retail chains H&M and Zara – not to mention acres of billboard space promoting lingerie, perfume, bags or sunglasses, depending on the season. And this is by no means all: outside that better-known fashion zone, there are many other significant style hotspots, including the Avenue Montaigne, Saint Germain and Le Marais.

In all of these places you'll find queues in front of fitting rooms and people drooling over window displays, branded handbags slung over their arms. Those who work in the fashion industry will tell you it's in crisis, but on the streets there is little evidence to back up this claim. The activity during the sales season in Paris is like a cross-breed of rugby and boxing, without the nice manners. At the beginning of the 21st century, it's terribly trendy to be fashionable.

The question is – why?

### Style addicts

Fashion brands employ many techniques to persuade us to part with our hard-earned cash in return for the transient thrill of wearing something new. In our hearts we know it's all smoke and mirrors – most of us have plenty to wear, and none of it is going to fall apart for a while yet. So why do we keep buying clothes? Can it really all be about

marketing?

As fashion scholar Bruno Remaury points out, ‘Traditional marketing is based on need. You take a product that corresponds to an existing demand, and attempt to prove that your product is the best in its category. But fashion is based on creating a need where, in reality, there is none. Fashion is a factory that manufactures desire.’

Many of those who work in the fashion business seem surprised – or at least mildly amused – by consumers’ willingness to be seduced. Fashion consultant Jean-Jacques Picart, who has worked with brands such as Christian Lacroix and Louis Vuitton, comments as follows: ‘For the people who are genuinely obsessed with fashion, it’s a sort of drug. This is a personal theory, but I believe it’s because they equate exterior change with interior change. They feel that, if they’ve changed their “look” they’ve also evolved emotionally.’

He hints that a preoccupation with fashion reveals a level of insecurity. ‘The most extreme fashionistas have a vulnerable quality about them. It’s as if they are worried about being judged. They live in a state of perpetual anxiety about their appearance.’

With disarming frankness, Picart describes his job as ‘a little cynical, a little perverse’. ‘The métier of fashion has a sole objective: to create brand appeal, in the same way that one might try to create sex appeal. Everything we do is designed to make people fall in love with our brand. All the trimmings of our industry – the shows, the advertising, the celebrities, the media coverage – all of these things work together so that, if we’ve done our job well, somebody will push open the door of a shop.’

It all sounds fiendishly modern. But of course, although the bait has grown in sophistication, fashion branding has been around almost as long as the Venus flytrap.

## **The first fashion brand**

For our purposes, fashion originated in Paris at the end of the 19th century. That was when the first designer label was created. Although its main market was France, its founder was English.

Charles Frederick Worth changed the rules of the game. Before he came along, dressmakers did not create styles or dictate fashion; they were mere suppliers, who ran up copies of gowns that their wealthy clients had seen in illustrated journals or admired at society gatherings. The clients themselves chose the fabrics and colours, and dresses were constructed around them, rather like scaffolding. Worth was the first couturier to impose his own taste on women – in effect, he was the prototype celebrity fashion designer.

Worth was born in the town of Bourne, Lincolnshire on 13 October 1826. Like many of history’s most imaginative designers – from Saint Laurent to Gaultier – he came from a relatively humble background. (Indeed, the desire to escape a humdrum existence via sumptuous dresses and beautiful women is a thread running through the history of fashion.) He was the son of a local solicitor, William Worth, who appears to have run into financial difficulties when Charles was just a boy. Assuming that it was now up to him to put bread on the family table, Charles headed for London, where he became an apprentice and later a bookkeeper at a drapery firm called Swan and Edgar in Piccadilly. It was here that he developed an eye for sumptuous fabrics and showed

the prodigious flair for salesmanship that was to serve him so well. At the age of 20, and by now burning with ambition, he left for Paris.

Worth got a job at the drapery house of Gagelin and Opigez at 83 Rue Richelieu. When he was not busy attending to the needs of his clients, he designed dresses for his new French bride, Marie Vernet, who also worked in the store. Soon, customers began to notice these elegant creations, which, although adhering to the bottom-heavy style of the day, seemed to have an extra dash of cut and colour. Worth was given a small department at the back of the establishment in which to display his designs. These could be made to measure for customers who admired them.

Gagelin and Opigez were unwilling to let Worth expand his business, so, with the backing of a wealthy young Swedish draper called Otto Bobergh, he branched out on his own. Worth & Bobergh was established at 7 Rue de la Paix in 1858. Although Worth had a number of influential clients, his big break came when he designed a gown for Princess Metternich, wife of the Austrian ambassador to Paris. Empress Eugénie spotted the dress at a ball in the Tuileries Palace, and summoned its designer.

Worth was soon dressing the world's most glamorous women. Unlike his predecessors, he was not a fawning servant, forced to make imitations of gowns his clients had seen elsewhere. As far as he was concerned, he had a better idea of how to enhance their looks than they did. Slowly but surely, he did away with bonnets and crinolines and began cutting dresses closer to the body. Hoop skirts were replaced by the infinitely more seductive 'sheath' dress – albeit garnished with bustles and trains that required cascades of expensive fabric.

More to the point, Worth was a marketing genius. Previously, dress designs had been displayed on wooden busts. (Scaled-down versions were sewn minutely on to dolls, which were sent out to potential clients as promotional devices.) Worth was the first couturier to sit his clients down and give them a little show – having first dressed a series of attractive young women he called *sosies*, or 'doubles', in his creations – thus inventing the concept of the fashion model. He would also identify fashionable women on whom he could place his dresses, knowing they would create a buzz as they mingled in high society. In private, he contemptuously referred to them as 'jockeys'.

In addition, Worth looked and acted like a proper fashion designer. Dapper and moustachioed, dressed from head to toe in velvet, a beret perched on his head, a cigar between his ostentatiously be-ringed fingers, he would greet clients while reclining on a divan. He had a capricious temper, too – there are reports of him furiously ripping half-finished garments to pieces because they were not exactly as he had envisaged them. Potential clients could be turned down, existing customers banished.

Here, already, we have many of the ingredients of contemporary fashion marketing: runway shows, celebrity models, elitism and, of course, a charismatic brand spokesman. Dictatorial and flamboyant, this was a man who rose from obscurity to become deified by the fabulously rich – by the time he died, on 10 March 1885, Worth had established a pattern for all other designers to follow. Certainly, he exhibited a high level of artistry, but of all the dressmakers of that period he was the first to wrap his own name in a fairy tale and resell it at a profit.

## Poiret raises the stakes

The one constant of fashion is constant change. Although Worth left his business in the capable hands of his two sons, Gaston and Jean-Philippe, his brand could not remain at the forefront of style for ever. This is not to say that it didn't have a pretty good run. A stand at the Paris Exposition of 1900 did a roaring trade, and the Worth name continued to resonate up to and beyond the 1920s (with a branded Worth perfume being launched as late as 1925). By then, though, the torch had been passed on not once, but twice.

The young designer Paul Poiret, recruited to Maison Worth by Jean-Philippe, soon began to challenge the restrictive styles of his masters. The son of a fabric merchant, Poiret had started out as an apprentice umbrella maker. In his spare time he had begun using umbrella silk to dress dolls in experimental designs. Poiret wanted to free women from the over-complicated structures that encumbered the upper body. Eventually he would banish the corset altogether, revolutionizing the way women dressed.

As is often the case, Poiret's employers weren't ready to embrace his radical ideas, and in 1904 he opened his own shop in the Rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré. In the years that followed, Poiret altered the outline of women's clothing for good. First came his interpretation of the Empire line: long straight dresses falling from a high waist that emphasized the bust. Then there was the 'hobble' skirt, cut so straight and narrow that its wearer could take only tiny steps (somewhat undermining claims that his clothes 'liberated' women). Inspired by fantasies of the Orient and the exotic Ballets Russes, Poiret devised variants of the kimono and baggy harem pants. The latter caused a sensation because, in fashion as in relationships, women were not expected to wear the trousers. Poiret went on to blur the boundaries between art and fashion, recruiting painters such as Georges Lapape and Raoul Dufy to illustrate his catalogues, and decorating his store in a style that prefigured Art Deco.

Like Worth before him, Poiret had a practical yet sophisticated approach to promoting his products. In 1911 he became the first couturier to launch a branded perfume, which he called Rosine after his eldest daughter. Poiret picked out the fragrance and designed the bottle, the packaging and the advertising. That same year, he threw a lavish party called 'The Thousand and Second Night', a fancy-dress extravaganza to which guests came as Persian royalty or cohorts of Scheherazade. The designer himself sported a natty gold turban. The most fashionable names in Europe were there, along with selected members of the press.

Poiret opened branded boutiques in major French cities and organized travelling fashion shows. He designed dresses for the actress Sarah Bernhardt, his very own celebrity muse. Later, when he refused to sell any more dresses to a certain member of the Rothschild family – who had apparently dared to mutter a criticism at one of his shows – he made sure the decision was widely broadcast.

Not all of his marketing efforts were entirely self-serving, however. In that golden year of 1911, he opened an atelier in which Parisian girls 'from modest backgrounds' were trained to produce fabrics, rugs, lampshades and other accessories for the home. These were sold in a boutique and several department stores under the Poiret sub-brand 'Martine', this time named after his youngest daughter.



But despite his talent, his marketing prowess and his influence, Poiret could not halt the onward march of fashion. His star was already descending after the First World War, and by the 1920s he was locked in bitter rivalry with the woman who was to become the fashion icon of the era, Gabrielle ‘Coco’ Chanel. According to Guillaume Erner in the book *Victimes de la Mode?* (2004), Poiret referred to Coco as ‘the inventor of misery’. Bumping into Chanel in her black ensemble one evening, Poiret exclaimed, ‘You must be in mourning! But for whom?’ Chanel is reputed to have replied, ‘For you, my dear.’

Poiret wasn’t quite ready to slip away. In 1925, during the Art Deco Exposition, he hired three vast Seine barges. The first he turned into a restaurant, the second a hairdressing salon, and the third a boutique selling his perfumes, accessories and furnishings. It was to be his last extravagance. In the words of Erner, ‘While the barges stayed afloat, the business sank.’

## Chanel, Dior and beyond

Gabrielle Chanel considered that Poiret’s dresses were costumes rather than clothes, and a growing number of women seemed to agree with her. ‘Eccentricity was dying: I hoped, by the way, that I helped to kill it,’ she said, as quoted in the book *L’Allure de Chanel* by Paul Morand (1996). Rubbing salt into the wound, she added that it was easy to attract attention dressed as Scheherazade, but a little black dress showed more class. ‘Extravagance kills personality,’ she pronounced.

Whatever the truth of these claims, there is no arguing with the fact that Chanel took fashion into the 20th century. But the move had actually been precipitated by social change. During the First World War, women worked in factories and fields and grew accustomed to the simplicity of uniforms. When it was all over, they were underfed but hardy, and unwilling to slip back into the traditional housewife/goddess role. (Many of them had, in any case, lost husbands and fiancés.) This was also the era of the automobile, which led to a more practical approach: short hair, skirts above the knee and tweed car coats. Women became less overtly feminine. Chanel and others – notably Jean Patou – adopted and embellished the androgynous style.

With her quotable wit and her talent for mixing with the right crowd, Coco fits right in to our alternative history of fashion – one that emphasizes the power of marketing. We certainly shouldn’t forget her perfume, simply named No.5 because it was the fifth in a series of samples she had to choose from. It was notable for being the first unabashedly synthetic scent, which contributed to its image of modernity.

While Chanel was busy twisting the fashion writers around her little finger, other designers were demonstrating that they also knew a promotional trick or two. Although her brand did not prove as resistant as that of Chanel (and, let’s face it, few did), Elsa Schiaparelli was a formidable pre-war competitor. Salvador Dali collaborated on her dress designs – notably providing a cheeky lobster print – and the curvaceous bottle containing her perfume, *Shocking*, was supposed to have been modelled on the bust of the actress Mae West. Unfortunately, such publicity coups could not sustain her business through the dark years of the 1940s.

War, of course, changed everything again. Although a number of fashion houses

sprang up in occupied Paris, Jacques Fath and Nina Ricci among them, the focus shifted to the United States. Until that time, fashionable American women bought expensive gowns that had been imported from Paris, or had more affordable copies run up closer to home. Even before the war, manufacturers on Seventh Avenue in New York had begun experimenting with synthetic fabrics, faster production techniques and light, interchangeable garments. This development accelerated in the 1940s, and New York became the birthplace of ready-to-wear. By the time peace broke out, the hegemony of Paris as the world's fashion capital was being challenged. Wartime innovations had shown that 'chic' need not mean personal dressmakers or 'haute couture'. For the first time, fashion was no longer the preserve of the wealthy elite.

Not that Paris had relinquished its importance. The 1950s saw the rise of Christian Dior, a man whose fervour for promotion outstripped even that of his predecessors. As well as being a visionary designer, the inventor of 'The New Look' was a moneymaking machine. He launched his first perfume in 1947 and a ready-to-wear store in New York in 1948. By the end of the decade, he had licensed his brand to a range of ties and stockings. He opened branches all over the world, from London to Havana. By the time he died prematurely, in 1957, he was employing over a thousand people – a situation previously unheard of for a couturier. More than anybody before him, Dior realized that luxury could be repackaged as a mass product. Not only that, he considered it the key to the survival and profitability of a brand. As quoted by Erner, he once commented, 'You know fashion: one day success, the next the descent into hell,' adding, 'I know lots of recipes, and one day ... they might come in useful. Dior ham? Dior roast beef? Who knows?' Perhaps it's no surprise that, today, the Dior brand is owned by the LVMH (Louis-Vuitton Moët Hennessy) empire – the ultimate expression of luxury as big business.

Beyond Dior, the dictatorship of the brand took hold. Even in the 1960s, when fashion was democratized and everyone claimed the right to be stylish, the marketers had the upper hand. When asked who invented the mini-skirt, herself or the French designer André Courrèges, Mary Quant replied generously, 'Neither – it was invented by the street.' Nevertheless, Quant was one of several designers who translated Sixties youth culture into profit, with considerable success.

Another such designer, on an entirely different scale, was Pierre Cardin, a man for whom extending the brand was little short of a crusade. A protégé of Christian Dior, naturally, Cardin noted very early on the decline of haute couture and acknowledged the potential of ready-to-wear (*prêt-à-porter*). He opened one store called Eve and another named Adam. He demanded, and got, a corner of the Parisian department store Printemps reserved exclusively for his brand. A darling of the media, he followed Dior's example by licensing his increasingly marketable identity, and today more than 800 different products around the world bear his name. In her (1999) book *The End of Fashion*, Teri Agins comments, 'There was always a manufacturer somewhere who was ready to slap "Pierre Cardin" on hair dryers, alarm clocks, bidets, and frying pans. "My name is more important than myself," Cardin once said.' Agins goes on to quote Henri Berghauer, who helped to manage Cardin's empire in the 1950s: 'Pierre realized early that he wanted to be more of a label than a designer. He wanted to be Renault.'

Although this strategy generated a vast personal fortune, it also undermined the sense of exclusivity that is the core value of any luxury brand. The Cardin label has

languished in the purgatory of the un-hip since the 1990s, and is only now seeing the first glimmer of a resurgence. The future of the brand could depend on whether the designer, aged 82 at the time of writing, decides to sell his business – although buyers have apparently balked at the asking price. ‘One billion euros, minimum,’ he told a newspaper reporter in 2011. ‘I work on the principle that, when I died, the business will be sold. So it might as well be me who does it.’ In the same piece, he estimates that he now has 700 licences in 100 countries (‘Pierre Cardin: My name is worth a million’, *La Provence*, 19 May 2011).

It’s impossible to talk about the fashion brands of the 1960s – or indeed the 1970s – without mentioning Yves Saint Laurent. Initially the successor to Dior, Saint Laurent quickly broke away to follow his own path, and it soon transpired that he was able to have his cake and eat it too. He was hailed as a genius of haute couture by the runway-watchers, while at the same time luring shoppers to his ‘luxury prêt-à-porter’ store, Saint Laurent Rive Gauche, in Paris’s Saint Germain district. YSL was keen on licensing, too, but, along with his business partner, Pierre Bergé, he kept a closer eye on quality control than Cardin had done. His biggest hit was a perfume, Opium, which launched in 1978 and remains popular today.

Throughout the 1970s the democratization of fashion continued apace. Art schools pumped out rebellious young designers, rock fell in love with avant-garde clothing, the fashion press exploded and the first generation of ‘stylists’ – those benign dictators of dress – told consumers what to wear and how to wear it.

In France, the *ancien régime* of haute couture experienced a paroxysm of self-doubt, as prêt-à-porter took the high ground and street-wear usurped aristocratic glamour. The French also faced a new challenge from across the Alps, where the Italian textile and leather merchants began developing their own brands. As early as 1965, the Italian leather goods and fur business Fendi was working with a talented young designer called Karl Lagerfeld, who helped to turn the small company into a ravishing brand. And Fendi was not the only Italian player; among the many others were Armani, Gucci, Cerruti, Krizia and Missoni, to name but a few. The London of the 1970s boasted plenty of fresh ideas, associated with names such as Ossie Clark, Anthony Price, Zandra Rhodes and the short-lived concept store Biba, but the real powerhouses of the future were being created in Milan. Until a French tycoon called Bernard Arnault began laying the foundations for LVMH in the 1980s, the Milanese seemed to have the monopoly on luxury as a business. They were traders at heart, and they knew how to marry art with commerce in a way that many French labels hadn’t quite grasped.

## **The death of fashion**

When did fashion stop being fashionable? To paraphrase Hemingway, it happened slowly, and then very quickly. Probably the rot set in around the mid- to late 1980s, provoked by a boom-to-bust economy and the emergence of AIDS as a powerful metaphor for the delayed hangover that followed the 1970s. The effect of the disease was terrifyingly real as it tore through the creative economy, robbing it of some of its brightest emerging stars.

Not that this grim decade was entirely devoid of hope. By now the most interesting thing on the catwalk was definitely in prêt-à-porter, with extraordinary creations from Jean-Paul Gaultier, Thierry Mugler and Kenzo. Elsewhere, Karl Lagerfeld was busy revitalizing Chanel – where he was appointed in 1983 – and Christian Lacroix was showing flamboyant dresses inspired by his passion for opera, folklore and the history of costume. This was, after all, the time of the New Romantic. The period also saw the emergence of the Japanese designers, notably Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo (of Comme des Garçons), whose ethereal black numbers combined minimalist rigour with futuristic interpretations of traditional garb. More costume than dress, they served as inspiration for the monochrome severity that characterized the tail-end of the 1980s.

More than anything, though, this was the era of the yuppie, the young upwardly mobile professional, whose clothing signified success. ‘Power dressing’ became a buzz phrase. Giorgio Armani’s unstructured but easily identifiable suits were worn as a badge of success. In the UK, while providing flashy City boys with eccentrically reworked interpretations of the tailored suit – his trademark ‘classics with a twist’ – Paul Smith also discovered the Filofax, a leather-bound ‘personal organizer’ manufactured by a tiny East End company. By popularizing this combination of address book and diary, which implied that its user had people to see and places to go, Smith handed the yuppies their ultimate accessory.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, Ralph Lauren had been steadily building one of the ultimate fashion brands. His rag-trade-to-riches story has been told many times before, but it’s worth briefly repeating here.

Born Ralph Lifshitz in 1939, the United States’ most upwardly mobile designer was the son of Russian Jewish immigrants from the Bronx. His father was a house painter, who changed the family name to Lauren when young Ralph was still at school. Ralph was brought up on the Hollywood movies of the 40s and 50s, mentally filing away images of Cary Grant and Fred Astaire so that he could recreate their style. He got his start in the fashion business selling suits at Brooks Brothers, and later became a wholesaler of ties and gloves in New York’s garment district. Soon he began designing his own ties, choosing the name ‘Polo’ for its aristocratic associations. The stylish neckwear proved a big hit at Bloomingdale’s, and by 1970 Ralph had taken over a corner of the Manhattan department store with an entire range of upmarket apparel.

According to Teri Agins, ‘Lauren will go down in fashion history for introducing the concept of “lifestyle merchandizing” in department stores ... Lauren designed [his] outpost to feel like a gentlemen’s club, with mahogany panelling and brass fixtures.’ She goes on to say that Lauren’s stores ‘stirred all kinds of longings in people, the dream that the upwardly mobile shared for prestige, wealth and exotic adventure’. But Ralph Lauren is important for another reason. European luxury brands frequently dwell on their ‘heritage’ for marketing purposes, using a tradition of craftsmanship as a way of seducing consumers and justifying elevated prices (think of Hermès, Louis Vuitton, Dunhill and Asprey). Almost subconsciously, Lauren realized that, in the United States, history was irrelevant. This was the land of Hollywood, of fantasy for sale.

Lauren created a world of aristocratic good taste, but it was pure invention. In the end, his success rested on the quality of his clothes and his knack for branding. Lauren’s shops were film sets, and his advertising campaigns – shot by Bruce Weber –