

Zelda Wynn Valdes and Coco Chanel



A Little About Me



My name is Makenna Naomi Prince and I fell in love with sewing at a tender age. My first ever sewing machine was purple with the Bratz girls on it. My mom did not know how to sew but she decided to buy me one anyway. I had no idea what I was really doing but sewed everything I could, even paper. Later on in life, my mother and father got me a new machine but it was still toy-like. With that machine, I tried to make clothing but I didn't really understand the foundation of it and how the pieces fit together. In high school I decided to join the Costume Shop and the Fashion club where I was able to better my skills. My teacher saw talent in me and I was able to quickly move up from beginner to expert (in terms of the class). I was even chosen to help others who were having a harder time sewing. In my final year of high school I challenged myself and made a dress for my model because I wanted my final show to be memorable. Now in college, I hope I will be able to earn my degree in Fashion and business.

Introduction



The majority of us are familiar with Hugh Hefner's Playboy bunnies but do you know who created the design for this iconic character. This controversial costume was designed by Zelda Barbour Wynn Valdes. Valdes was born on the 28th of June in the summer of 1905 in Chambersburg, PA. As a little girl Valdes used to watch her grandmother sew and picked up on what she saw. Her grandmother was a seamstress who did a lot of sewing and thought the skill to her grandkids. After apprenticing under her grandmother she decided that she would sew a dress for her. Valdes' grandmother did not think that she would be able to make a proper dress for her (grandmother) and said, "...I'm too big and too tall." Valdes did not let her grandmother's words stop her and she created a dress that fits perfectly to her grandmother's amazement. Valdes graduated from Chambersburg High School in the year of 1923, which marked the end of her formal education. Shortly after her graduation, Valdes's family moved to White Plains, New York. Valdes later started to work in her uncle's tailoring shop where she acquired more hands-on skills and understanding of sewing. Valdes then moved on to working in a fancy high-end boutique shop as a stock girl around the 1930s. It was not easy for her at first since she was black and the clients judged her race and not her skills but eventually, they realized that she was very skillful and she then began to climb up the ladder and open up more opportunities. In her 40s Valdes opened a shop in Manhattan called "Chez Zelda" along with her sister who assisted her. Valdes went on to sewing clothes for high-class singers and ballets. Valdes passed away at the age of 92 in the year 2001.

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Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel, or otherwise known as Coco Chanel has become one of the biggest designers and a household name. Coco Chanel was on August 19th, 1886 in Saumur France. At a very young age Chanel's mom passed away and

her father who was a peddler placed her into an orphanage. In the orphanage the nurses thought Chanel how to sew. Chanel would also take vacations to visit her aunt who thought her how to make hats. As a young adult Chanel sang and performed at the clubs Vinchy and Moulins. In her singing career she was nicknamed Cocotte, which was then shortened to Coco. Chanel was in a relationship with Etienne Balsan who help her start her own millinery (hat making) business. Balsan gave Chanel a place in his mansion for her to make hats for her and her friends but Chanel wanted more. Chanel later left Balsan and started to get involved with Arthur Capel who also helped her further her business in fashion. Both men help Chanel open her first millinery shop in 1910 then her first couture house. Chanel was a mistress to wealthy men many times and she used those men to help fund her dream of being a designer and opened open many couture houses in rich areas. Her business lived through both WWI and WWII. In WWI fashion had to take a break as they could not focus on making fancy fabrics and focus on the war. Chanel had the brilliant idea of using jersey, which was used in men clothing, to make comfortable clothing the women could wear while they were working. In WWII Chanel's brand had to take a break because she started a relationship with a Nazi German soldier in France. Besides the ups and

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Chanel was able to break the tradition of uncomfortable women clothing and give them an option they never had before. Chanel died at the age of 84 in the year of 1971.

The Market Segments: Zelda Wynn Valdes

Valdes is most famously known for designing Hugh Hefner's playboy bunny but she has done more than that. Valdes is the first black woman designer in America. She mostly designed clothing for top black women in the entertainment industry. These women would come to Valdes because she knew how to design clothing that fit their bodies and natural curves perfectly. Most of the women were singers and very well known for what they did. They all were breaking down barriers of their own as there were black women in an industry that didn't really support them at first just like Valdes. Her clientele included entertainers like Dorothy Dandridge, Marian Anderson, Josephine Baker, Ella Fitzgerald, Mae West, Ruby Dee, Eartha Kitt, Sarah Vaughan, and others.



Seeing as most of her clients were entertainers they had to put on lots of shows and attended social gatherings, Valdes not only designed their costumes but she also designed fashionable clothing for their gatherings. In an interview with New York Times Valdes



mentioned that she only got to measure Ella Fitzgerald once in 12 years and the other time she had to make outfits for her she had to do it from imagination. To add on to that she also said that Fitzgerald would always order 3 dresses at a time and only gave her 3-4 days to complete them. Valdes mentioned that she was proud she never missed a deadline and was proud of them.

Valdes designed clothing for famous black artists wives like Nat "King" Cole's wife, Maria Ellington, "blue ice" wedding dress. She was also responsible for creating the sexier version of Joyce Bryant who was coined as the black Marilyn Monroe by Life Magazine. Valdes

1st photo is Dorothy Dandridge being fitted for a gown by designer, Zelda Wynn Valdes in a photo from a 1954 issue of HUE

2nd photo is Joyce Bryant (Photo by Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images)

3rd photo is the original Playboy costume

The Market Segments: Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel

started working with Arthur Mitchell who was the first black principal dancer. He wanted her to design costumes for the ballets, which she ended up doing for the rest of her career. With Arthur Mitchell, Valdes traveled around the world creating costumes for over 80 productions.

The “thing” Valdes is mostly known from is her design of the Playboy bunny. The reason Hugh Hefner chose Valdes for designing the iconic costume that would captivate so many men, is because she had a talent for making the woman’s body “sexier”. Valdes skill was making the outfit fit woman just right on their natural shape and she had a low cut on the top.



The Market Segments: Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel

Chanel's original target market was women who were seeking relief from all the tight and restraining corsets they had to wear. When she originally open her shop, she only sold hats, she quickly climbed up from that. Chanel would wear her own designs and when other women asked where she got it, she would ask if they wanted her to make them one. Before making clothing,



Chanel expanded by adding a store in Deauville and Biarritz. She got her first feel of success after she used jersey fabric to make a dress. In the 1920s Chanel decided to take things a little further in her business by adding a perfume. Chanel once said that perfume is ultimate accessory to fashion. Chanel wouldn't have been able to produce her products without the help

Pierre and Paul Wertheimer who took 70 percent of her perfumes (Chanel no.5) profit.

Chanel was widely known for her little black dress and her Chanel suit. Those two iconic pieces also came out in the 1920s and were both revolutionary during their time. Chanel borrowed designs that were usually used for man clothing and made it feminine. She also took that color that was seen only as a color for mourning and turned it into an elegant dress. Chanel also designed costumes for Ballets Russes and Jean Cocteau's play Orphée. Chanel had over 2,000 people employed but unfortunately, she had to fire most of them after the depression in the 1930s. Chanel went out of business in the 1940s because she had a relationship with a German soldier but she was not charged with collaborations. She made a return in 1954 when she was around 70 years old.



The Market Segments: Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel

After Chanel's death, her company was taken over by Karl Lagerfeld who became the company's head designer. Chanel's brand is still a women's clothing store but does have watches and cologne for men. Right now the target market is both women ages 18 to 40(and over).

Compare and Contrast

Both Valdes and Chanel did what wasn't thought of before, they were women designers in a men ruled field. Chanel started her own empire using the money of the men who were attracted to her. Valdes had to climb up the ladder on her own with the financial help Chanel had. Both women fulfilled their dreams and lived a full life doing what they loved. Chanel's creation succeeded her and is still attracting a lot of buyers. On the other hand Valdes did a lot thorough her life and never retired but she didn't have a brand that succeeded her. Valdes lived her life for herself and did not what to write a biography.

Looks and Production: Zelda Wynn Valdes

Zaldes was known for her sexy low cut, shape forming, curve hugging clothes. Valdes designed all the dresses specific to each of her clients. Vades took the measurements of her clients in order to design the perfect fitting dresses for their performance. Most of her designs are strapless have a very low cut. Valdes was also not afraid of beads and



appliques, lots of her dresses had. She Also had lots of “mermaid” style dresses that were tight and fitted from the top to around the knee/sheen area where it fluffed out. Valdes clothing was not mass produced so not everyone was able to wear her designs, only elite entertainers and the ballet company she worked with.



Based on the pictures, Valdes worked with fine fabrics like silk but she also work with a lot of sheer fabrics and cotton. Her designs were show stopping and bold with the sparkles, shine and flare that captivated everyone. There is much information on Valdes like there is on other designers like Coco Chanel, so here are some photos to show the types of fabrics she worked with.

Valdes did not only work on dresses she also made costumes for over 80 productions. The costume were elegant like her original designs but they were also workable for the proformer. In the photos we can see the different types of fabrics she used and we can also see her most common design.



Looks and Production: Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel



Chanel is known for her sophisticated working woman look. Her clothes are supposed to be comfortable and non-restricting. Chanel believed that if the clothing was not comfortable it wasn't fashion at all. The majority of her designs were simple yet elegant and very sophisticated. Chanel worked with lots of woven and jersey fabrics which were apart of her staple clothing. Chanel took a design that was traditional for men and made it into something women could wear and still feel beautiful. She used a woven fabric similar to the looks of a potato sack and made it into a luxurious suit for women. During the war (WWI) she use a fabric that was used for creating men clothing and made women clothing with it. Using that Jersey fabric she made clothing that working women could wear without feeling burdened by their clothing. Chanel used that fabric to create her little black dress which she believed every woman own and they mostly did during that time.

Besides clothing Chanel made hats, perfume and jewelry, basically everything a woman would need during that time. Chanel was known for her posh suits and dresses. Chanel's look wasn't and still isn't within the price range of many lower class people so in order for them to feel like they're apart of the exclusive club, they can purchase her perfume and cheaper bags.

Promotions

Zelda Wynn Valdes did not sell clothing to masses so she did not advertise her clothing. Valdes career really started to grow while she worked in the high-end boutique shop. Most people doubted her skills because she was black but when they saw what she could do she quickly raised to the top. Valdes had entertainers coming to her to get their costumes of regular fashions made. Valdes did not need to promote her work because her work promoted itself. Valdes took pride in what she did and even tried to work in a field she hadn't worked in before, ballet. She ended up dressing the ballets for 80 productions. Zelda directly sold her fashions to her customers.

In the start, Coco Chanel did not really do much promotional work but when she expanded with Wertheimer brothers her work got promoted more. Chanel would wear her own designs and people would want to know where she got it from making herself her own promoter. Chanel's products can be purchased from department stores like Macy's. The department stores also advertise the item on tv and radios. Chanel (the company) also have a website that you directly purchase the lat designers inspired designs. There's also a lot of advertisements on social media that promotes the high-end designs.

Personal Point of View

One of Fashions hidden figure is Zelda Wynn Valdes, she was the first black designer.

The fact that not many people know about her and how she was the start of breaking down walls in the fashion industry for black people is heartbreaking. Valdes did not let racial injustice stop her from climbing her way to the top. Valdes also work with other black women that broken the glass ceilings in their respective field. Not only is she a historic person but she also inspires me to do what I think is impossible, until this project I have not heard of many black designers or any at all. It all most seemed like it was impossible to be black and a great designer but this project proved me wrong and I'm glad it did. Beside her being the first he designs we remarkable and was mostly worn by top singers. Her work was all about class and sophistication with a hint of sexiness. Her dresses were filled with intricate designs and her signature low top.

Chanel is one of the most iconic name in the world of fashion. She is also very important because she was apart of the movement to get women out of restricting clothing and in comfortable yet chic clothing. Chanel is known for going from rags to riches. Chanel was not afraid to use her sexual appeal in order to attract wealthy men. Those men help fund the in her first store and soon her first couture house. At the beginning a lot of the other women were scornful of Chanel since she was a mistress and because her clothing broke the social norm. Those women and others soon realised that Chanel was on to something and adopted her style into their wardrobe. Chanel's designs were among the first comfortable clothing these women had to wear. They especially loved it because the comfort did not cost them from looking luxurious, in fact it made them more luxurious. Chanel was very important and ahead of her time because women were entrepreneurs and did not have their own businesses.

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