

HER FACE MAY BE FUNNY, BUT HER STYLE'S DEFINITELY PRETTY

Marie Fourmeaux analyses the costumes of *Funny Face*, which saw the beginning of the stylish collaboration between Audrey Hepburn and Hubert de Givenchy. An outstanding runway show displaying Monsieur de Givenchy's extraordinary genius and fashion-forward vision, it is a lesson of timeless elegance but also a strong stance about the role of fashion.

"I think my face is funny." This is how Jo Stockton, played by Audrey Hepburn, describes herself. And, in real life, a funny face the famous actress thought she had indeed. She thought she had a weird body as well, due to the starvation she endured during World War II. If Audrey Hepburn may have doubted the aesthetics of her looks, however, there is something she actually nailed: her sense of style. Having spotted the exceptional qualities of the young designer Hubert de Givenchy, who had opened his house in 1952, she expressly requested that he create her wardrobe for *Funny Face* after a failed attempt at doing so for her previous film, *Sabrina*. As he couldn't make the deadline, she had to content herself with picking only three outfits from his past collection. But with *Funny Face*, their actual collaboration began and the result is fashion history.

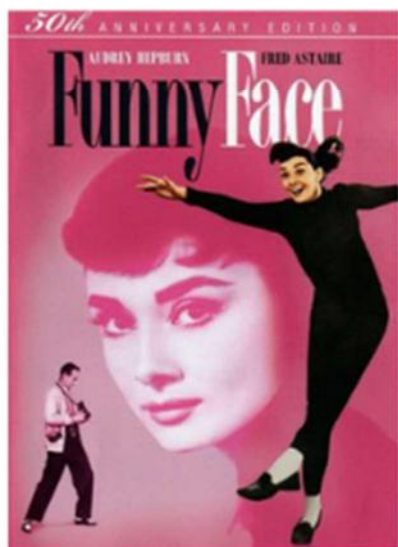
Even though the movie was made in 1956, that is to say 63 years ago, one cannot help but be struck by the absolute modernity of the outfits. These clothes could well have emerged from last season's catwalks. They could easily be worn today without looking like you've travelled from the past or have a passion for recycling your great-grand mother's wardrobe.

Look at the armada of Ms. Prescott's (editor of 'Quality Magazine') secretaries. They're all wearing pencil and pleated midi skirts! Does

it feel like you've seen something similar recently? Ditch the hats and you're ready to go to work! Look at Audrey Hepburn as a tourist wandering the streets and cafés of Paris, donning a pair of black straight tailored trousers, a black turtle neck, loafers and a beige hooded trench coat, or turning up at the fashion studio, wearing again a pair of black trousers with a white cotton shirt. Aren't those looks the most "basic" styles: effortlessly chic, claimed by women around the world and spread over time on the pages of fashion magazines?

"Clothes for the woman who isn't interested in clothes." That is Ms Prescott's topic for the next main feature of *Quality Magazine*. And, as it is, the 1950s saw the beginning of women's emancipation, requiring therefore more comfortable and practical clothing. Monsieur de Givenchy mastered this evolution without sacrificing style, femininity or aesthetics. He surfed on a wave, managing to create a collection that stood the test of time, to which every woman in the 21st century can relate and would dream to wear.

His innovative vision lies in the use



of exceptional and fitted tailoring as well as minimal, classic, clean and practical designs that take into consideration every aspect of a woman's life: daily activities, evening occasions, and even her wedding. Everything about Audrey's (or, rather, Jo's) looks has to do with comfort and practicality, from the midi length dresses to the use of separates.

The first outfit Jo is wearing at the atelier of the French couturier, Paul Duval, is simple, clean-cut and is



All images from *Funny Face*

made of separates: a sharp-looking evening gown with a crop-top creating a train. Why would an evening gown necessarily need to be bulky, heavy and make you feel like you're drowning in bows and sashes, when it can be comfortable, easy to move around in, and yet remain very flattering? Such is the concern for a practical style in the film that even the wedding dress is short-length, which was not exactly the mainstream aesthetic of the time. And it is easy to imagine, without it feeling anachronistic, Audrey Hepburn sporting one of the most oh-so trendy pieces of the moment: the boiler suit!



The fashion choices of *Funny Face* are both central characters and the witnesses of a turning point in fashion history. Indeed, the design and aesthetic of apparel had evolved drastically since the 1900s. As if embarking on a sort of 'purification', fashion discarded, over the years, any irrelevant, overbearing or overwhelming structures, volumes, tricks or details.

In *Funny Face*, Hubert de Givenchy is unveiling before our very eyes the core and very essence of apparel. He is teaching us the main characteristic of timeless style and elegance: simplicity. This is the key to modernity and versatility. And as far as timeless style goes, his designs would do very well with a

touch of the eccentricity, accessories and specifics of 2019 fashion.

How about zebra-printed platform sandals with the dreamy long red bustier chiffon dress Audrey is proudly showcasing on the steps of the Louvre, in front of the Winged Victory of Samothrace? How about gold trainers with the cream crop-top and tailor pants ensemble she wears on the little *péniche*? How about a denim jacket, snakeskin chunk-heeled low boots or neon court shoes to parade in the Tuileries with this lovely little black dress? Even the ballerina style dress (or skirt), a typical design of the 1950s, managed its way through time to become a permanent fixture of a woman's wardrobe (albeit with much less petticoats), especially in

recent years. Think, for example, of the designs by Maria Grazia Chiuri for Dior for the Spring/Summer 2019 collection.

Simplicity is also the means to reveal and magnify women's beauty and silhouettes. That is also the stance *Funny Face* takes as to what the purpose of fashion is meant to be: complementing women's beauty, power and seduction. This viewpoint is made clear by the French couturier in the movie, Paul Duval. Right after the first dress of his collection has been put on Audrey Hepburn/Jo Stockton, he says to the *Quality Magazine* team (do not forget to turn on French accent mode when reading this): "My friends, you saw enter here a waif, a gamine, a lowly caterpillar.



We open the cocoon, but it is not a caterpillar that emerges. (...) No. It's a bird of paradise." And this is exactly what this story is about: we see a poorly dressed bookstore employee, passionate about philosophy and abstract concepts of the mind, becoming a beautiful woman, confident in her looks and in who she is.

As such, this movie demonstrates that women do not need to choose between being either pretty or brainy. The scene in the bookshop, when Dick Avery (Fred Astaire) photographs Quality Magazine's somewhat dim model Marion, clothed in an exquisite figure-hugging dress, next to philosophy-passionate yet shabby looking Jo Stockton, holding her books, is very revealing. On one side, the impersonation of brains without femininity or seduction. On the other side, the impersonation of seduction and femininity but definitely not brains. It feels like these two characters have aspects that complement each other, waiting to be reunited.

"Keep in mind that you're a woman who thinks," says a desperate Dick Avery to Marion. In the same way, the role of the designer is to perceive and understand who women are and what they want, even if they don't know it themselves. The eyes of Dick Avery are, in fact, those of a designer spotting a beauty and



making sure she blossoms. Inner beauty alone can't make a woman, yet fashion can't entirely make one either. The aim of fashion is to "adjust" to her and to who she is, to reveal her to the world, and to magnify her personality, and that's what we call style.

To our benefit, the sparkling collaboration between Audrey Hepburn and Hubert de Givenchy lasted four decades, both on and off-screen (*Breakfast at Tiffany's* was to follow in 1961), until her untimely death in 1993. There is a lecture on intemporal style and timeless elegance. However, in *Funny Face*, Givenchy's talent showcases the epitome, or, dare we say, the maturity, of fashion in terms of

aesthetic design, and one may wonder if fashion design has ever known such thing as a revolution since 1956.

Indeed, lines and cuts from previous eras are being revisited. Volumes vary, so do the width of shoulder pads, the length of skirts and dresses or the rise of trousers. Fashion season after fashion season, we see details from past fashion styles resurfacing: beads and fringes from the 20s, prints from the 60s and the 70s and so on. What is left to our time has probably more to do with the use of new techniques in the actual conception of clothes and craftsmanship in their making, and discovering, creating or working with new or unusual fabrics (neoprene, vinyl, plexiglass or plastic, to mention a few).

At the time, Hubert de Givenchy's role may have been overshadowed by the costume designer who received the Oscar for *Funny Face*, but he got his revenge, as Audrey Hepburn's iconic sense of style is forever associated with him. He loved women and it showed. He spent his life praising their beauty, preserving, as Ms. Prescott would say, their "blood, brain and pizzazz".



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