

Icons of Architecture and Fashion:  
An Exploration of the Complex Relationship Between the Two Fields

An honors thesis for the Department of Art and Art History

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## Contents

1. Introduction, 1
2. Frank Lloyd Wright, 22
3. Coco Chanel, 32
4. Christian Dior, 43
5. Philip Johnson, 51
6. Yves Saint Laurent, 61
7. I. M. Pei, 71
8. Frank Gehry, 81
9. Alexander McQueen, 90
10. Conclusion, 100
11. Image List, 104
12. Bibliography, 105

## Introduction

At first glance, the fields of architecture and fashion may appear to be completely unrelated and independent of each other. One field is concerned with the built environment and the other is the driving force behind the clothing industry. Additionally, for many people, the two fields are relevant to only their practitioners, scholars, and enthusiasts. However, architecture and fashion are highly influential modes of creative expression that constantly intersect, drawing inspiration from one another and affecting the daily lives of people throughout the world.

Fundamentally, architecture and fashion share the same purpose, that is, to provide shelter and protection for the human body. In this regard, we live in architecture and fashion. The buildings we inhabit and the clothes we wear transcend elements for survival, as an equal, if not greater importance is placed on their aesthetic value. With this aesthetic quality holding such significance, a building or piece of clothing is instilled with meaning, allowing for their other basic functions as means of identity expression. Whether intentional or unintentional, we provide indications about our “personal, political, religious, or cultural”<sup>1</sup> identities through our choices for the spaces in which we live and the garments with which we clothe ourselves.

The intersections between architecture and fashion are numerous. The two share a common vocabulary, often referencing the other in descriptive language, as in the terms “curtain wall” and “structural jacket.” This shared vocabulary stems from the equal importance that both, as designed three-dimensional objects, place on proportion, geometry, and mathematics, as well as an understanding of mass and space. Since structures and clothing must be fabricated, there is also a shared interest in construction and materials. As the producers of the constructions in which we conduct our daily lives, architecture and fashion define and give form to the spaces of

our environments. Architecture and fashion scholar Bradley Quinn elaborates on this idea, writing,

“The organization of space has always been the essence of both fashion and architecture; fashion’s architectuality unfolds in its containment of space, while architecture continues to be fashioned by its relationship to the human form. Architecture’s domination of space is widespread, while fashion’s role in mediating space is generally regarded as secondary; yet fashion constitutes architecture’s spatial and ideological equal.”<sup>2</sup>

Together architecture and fashion dictate our movement through the world around us. As Quinn indicates, architecture appears to have a larger impact in defining space, but this perception is based on scale. The space immediately surrounding the body is created and altered by fashion. It is this space that architecture must contain. These numerous intersections and interactions between architecture and fashion cause the two fields to rely on similar ideologies in their design, as Quinn notes. Such interest in theory and history in the creative process places both on an equal level of intellectual engagement.

Beyond organizing space, architecture and fashion provide it with visual interest, drawing upon the same inspirations and each other to establish their aesthetic characteristics. The two fields are influenced by the same “aesthetic tendencies, ideological and theoretical foundations, and technological innovations,”<sup>3</sup> often resulting in stylistic overlap. The extent to which this overlap occurs, while at times contested, is vastly underappreciated. It is most clearly seen when fashion and architecture look to each other for inspiration. Fashion has long been known to turn to architecture, with the terms “architectural” and “structural” consistently used to describe garments that display certain qualities often seen in buildings. Jeremy Strick, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, commented on this relationship, writing,

“Since the 1980s, a growing number of avant-garde fashion designers have approached garments as architectonic constructions, while architecture has boldly embraced new forms and materials – thanks to numerous technological advancements that have

revolutionized both the design and construction of buildings and made techniques like pleating, stitching, folding and draping part of the architectural vocabulary.”<sup>4</sup>

The use of architecture as inspiration by fashion designers can be seen decades earlier than the 1980s, such as in the work of André Courreges who was inspired by Le Corbusier. It was not until the 1980s, though, that fashion designers began to adopt the principles of architectural construction, deepening the exchange between the two fields. Today, architects have in turn begun to draw inspiration from fashion, whether through the technique of “folding,” which began in the 1990s, or in the mimicry of fabric in building construction. This exchange between the two fields, while much more common and openly discussed today, can be traced throughout history, such as in the way the drapery folds of the woolen tunic were repeated in the Greek column or the way the verticality of Gothic architecture could be seen in the pointed clothing from the same time period.<sup>5</sup>

The modernist movement in architecture, with its stripped-down design and focus on structure rather than ornament for aesthetic character, was and still is highly influential in fashion, often serving as the inspiration for fashion designers that are considered to be “architectural” in their design style. This translation from architecture to fashion is most often cited as minimalism, such as in the work of Calvin Klein, who is “acknowledged as the contemporary master, if not originator, of minimalist fashion.”<sup>6</sup> In addition to Klein, Narciso Rodriguez is a contemporary fashion designer whose work displays the influence of the International Style of architecture, sharing the same interest in structure and construction as the sources of beauty that is found in the work of such architects as Mies van der Rohe. These two designers, as well as others who create minimalist fashion, owe “substantial debt to designers including Halston, Yves Saint Laurent, Giorgio Armani, Miuccia Prada, and Helmut Lang.”<sup>7</sup>

Unlike the connection between modernism and minimalism, the overlap of deconstruction in both architecture and fashion is mostly based on process rather than ideology. The most famous practitioner of deconstructionism in architecture is Frank Gehry, whose initial work with taking apart, or deconstructing, then rearranging elements of a building draws many comparisons to the work of Martin Margiela, who disassembled and reused vintage clothes to make new garments. Gehry is representative of deconstructionist practices in architecture, while Margiela is more conceptual than most fashion designers. Other fashion designers, such as Rei Kawakubo of Comme de Garçons and Yohji Yamamoto, adopted deconstruction in their lines, but on a less conceptual level than Margiela. It is noteworthy, though, that Kawakubo and Yamamoto are considered more avant-garde than most fashion designers. Overall, deconstruction in architecture is more theoretically based than its fashion equivalent. Brooke Hodge, curator of architecture and design at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, explains the overlap of deconstructionism in architecture and fashion, writing, “While fashion designers and architects may not have adopted ideas of deconstruction for the same reasons or from the same sources, it is telling that these tendencies emerged in both practices at about the same time.”<sup>8</sup> As Hodge indicates, architecture and fashion reflect societal and cultural conditions and when such overlap occurs, the study of their intersection can be revealing both about the fields and about the conditions of society at a particular time.

While fashion designers often draw inspiration from a particular building or reference a specific architect, architects look to fashion and garments more generally. The most common fashion references architects make are in recreating the qualities of fabric in the construction of buildings, experimenting with the potentials of traditional architectural materials. Today, terms including “pleating, stitching, folding, and draping”<sup>9</sup> are used architecturally. The work of Peter

Eisenman and Frank Gehry often demonstrates the concept of folding. Gehry's designs embody other characteristics of fabric as well, such as his Hotel Marqués de Riscal in Elciego, Spain with its draping forms that are often compared to ribbons and his Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles with its composition of volumes that wrap the body in the same way as a garment. Toyo Ito also experiments with the concept of wrapping, designing geometric skins that wrap his buildings and cling to their structures as a fitted dress clings to the body, such as in his Tod's Building in Tokyo.

Ito, like many other contemporary architects, has designed flagship stores for major fashion companies, including Tod's, representing a growing trend for this collaboration between luxury brands and well-known architects. With the development of the department store in the late nineteenth century, the architecture of clothing stores quickly became an important focus, requiring architects to consider the role of the garment in their designs. In many ways, the clothing store, especially the flagship store, has come to represent a brand or company. For this reason, fashion companies have become even more concerned with the design of their stores.

Similarly, architecture has played a key role in fashion photography throughout the genre's history, constantly appearing in advertisements and editorials. As a result, architecture has a permanent presence in the fashion magazine, one of the most influential institutions of the industry. In addition, fashion advertisements are often included in architecture magazines. As design-focused individuals who are aware of the fashion image, architects are often known to maintain a relatively fashionable appearance, especially today as they interact even more frequently with the fashion industry. Within the field of architecture, the image, or "look", of the architect is recognizable. Certain architects are known for their individual style or a specific

defining garment, such as Philip Johnson who was always seen wearing his thick-rimmed black circular glasses.

The relationship between architecture and fashion has inspired a number of academic investigations, with an increasing number of scholars showing interest in the topic during the last two decades. Today there is a selection of writings ranging from broad studies of the parallels between the two fields to explorations of specific ways in which they intersect. The writers have various backgrounds, representing architecture and fashion, as well as the art world, academia, and journalism. Before the publication of any major work on the topic, museums and galleries began to display exhibitions that made connections between the two fields. As investigation of the relationship of architecture and fashion continues to develop, these writings and exhibitions will continue to be influential and will further our understanding of the two fields.

One of the earliest comprehensive books about this relationship is Deborah Fausch's *Architecture in Fashion*, published in 1994. This compilation of essays provides a thorough background about the major intersections between architecture and fashion, in addition to multiple perspectives on the position of each field in relation to the other. In her introduction, Fausch writes that there are "two conflicts between architecture and fashion," including "the transitory: architecture, unlike fashion's system of rapid change, is static" and "the vestimentary: architecture, like fashion's garment, clothes the body."<sup>10</sup> These two areas of interest establish a loose guideline for the essays chosen. Almost all of the authors address the issue of architects viewing fashion "as frivolous, unfunctional, and wasteful, the antithesis of rationality and simplicity,"<sup>11</sup> two qualities for which architecture, especially that based on the theories of Modernism, often strives. This is the main topic of focus in "White Out: Fashioning the Modern" by architect and Dean of Columbia University's School of Architecture, Planning, and



Preservation Mark Wigley, who seems to argue against the rejection of fashion by architecture and for its role as being fundamental in the field. In his essay “‘In’ Architecture: Observing the Mechanisms of Fashion,” architect and Cornell professor Val Warke discusses the influence architecture and fashion have on one another, the negative connotation of “fashion” and the “fashionable” often encountered within the field of architecture, the role of fashion as a trend in relation to architecture and the art world, and the influence of fashion on culture as a whole. Architect and Columbia professor Mary McLeod addresses the issue of gender in relation to architecture and fashion in her writing “Undressing Architecture: Fashion, Gender, and Modernity” and historian Helene Lipstadt equates the signature of the architect and the label of the designer for their roles in elevating the structure and the garment in her lecture “The Signature on the Building: Propositions for a Method of Comparison of Architecture and Fashion Using Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of the *Griffe*”.

Wigley, who is featured in *Architecture in Fashion*, published his *White Walls, Designer Dresses* only one year after, in 1995. In this book he elaborates on the supposed rejection of fashion by the Modernist movement in architecture. Wigley’s writing is firmly rooted in theory, approaching the white wall not only from an aesthetic perspective but from a functional and symbolic view as well. He identifies the white wall as the one common element shared by the architects and buildings that are considered to be “modern”. Wigley suggests that even though the practitioners of Modernism viewed their work as pure, timeless, and free of the fluctuations of fashion, their work was based on this one, in many ways fashionable, element. He writes, “The visible aging of the white wall calls into question that architecture’s ability to transcend the turnover of fashionable styles. Superficial flaws become deep threats.”<sup>12</sup> The white wall became a style that was repeated and reinterpreted in the same way the fashion industry perpetuates

trends. When the trend was not properly followed, the success of the architecture was questioned. Wigley takes his concept even further, rejecting the idea expressed by many architectural theorists and critics that whitewashed modern buildings are naked and equating this fundamental element of modern architecture, the white wall, with a garment, arguing, “No matter how thin the coat of paint is, it is still a coat...It is itself a very particular form of clothing. And by sustaining a logic of clothing, modern architecture participates in many of the economies from which it so loudly announces its detachment.”<sup>13</sup>

Bradley Quinn’s *The Fashion of Architecture*, published in 2003, provides a more recent overview of the intersections between architecture and fashion, addressing some of the same topics as Fausch’s *Architecture in Fashion* while focusing on specific and unique examples. The publication is the catalogue for the exhibition “The Fashion of Architecture: Constructing the Architecture of Fashion” displayed at the Center for Architecture in New York and curated by Quinn in 2003. Quinn’s writing is guided by the theoretical connections between the two fields and addresses such topics as the construction of space, the exchange between place and non-place, the void, movement through urban life, and fluid form. The background information Quinn provides in his introduction is the most extensive of any recent publication. He details what he calls the “significant connections” between architecture and fashion and examines the relationship between architects and fashion designers, concluding with an investigation of the highly debated classification of buildings and clothing as “art”. In a chapter titled “Fashion Space” Quinn defines the concept as “a synthesis between fiction and realism. In the fusion between them, the act of shaping and forming social identities is constructed and performed.”<sup>14</sup> He explains that fashion space permeates culture and society providing an argument for the significance of the garment industry, which is a visual expression of fashion space. In another

chapter Quinn discusses the dynamic relationship between architecture, fashion, and art, stating, “Many exchanges are taking place between art, fashion and architecture. Their fascination for one another seems to spiral around their mutual desire to see life transmuted into art.”<sup>15</sup> He relates this to the potential labeling of architecture and fashion as “art” due to the significance of their aesthetic qualities and examines the issues surrounding this classification. Quinn discusses recent developments in the exchanges between the three fields and indicates that this constantly evolving relationship will influence the future of both.

The catalogue for the 2006 exhibition “Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture” at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles provides a thorough overview of the parallels between the two fields. Curator Brooke Hodge recounts the historical relationship between architecture and fashion and details each of the ways they intersect today. This background information complements the compelling examples displayed in the exhibition. Hodge establishes the fundamental similarities and intersections between fashion and architecture in addition to the ways in which they inspire each other. She traces their relationship to the Ice Age, during which animal skins were used for both clothing and shelter and includes other notable moments in history, such as Ancient Greece and Medieval Europe, during which there were clear stylistic parallels or mutual influences. Hodge analyzes the same twentieth century stylistic movements that are examined by other authors, including modernism and deconstruction. She devotes a large portion of the introduction to a discussion about the creative process and an investigation of “tectonic strategies”, or structural innovations and manipulations that exist in or influence both architecture and fashion. It is in this section that Hodge elaborates on the concept of skin and bones, comparing the structures of buildings and clothing to the basic structural elements of the human body. She defines the “skin” of a building as “the continuous

exterior surface that covers the structural framework, or ‘bones’,”<sup>16</sup> and ties this to clothing’s fundamental structural reliance on its wearer’s skin and bones. Hodge also comments on the development of such parallel investigations of architecture and fashion, citing the 1980s as the beginning of their dynamic and close relationship that is the cause for academic interest. She writes, “For designers in both fields, the early 1980s were characterized by a struggle for liberation from convention that involved experimentation with new forms and an openness to ideas and techniques from other disciplines to inspire radically different approaches to design.”<sup>17</sup> According to Hodge, since this time the two fields have evolved to frequently intersect with and influence each other. She concludes, “This cross-fertilization may result in the development of increasingly hybrid practices.”<sup>18</sup> She suggests that investigations such as her own are essential for the future understanding of architecture and fashion.

Like “Skin + Bones Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture” and “The Fashion of Architecture: Constructing the Architecture of Fashion”, certain exhibitions focused on the relationship between the two fields have been very influential on scholarship about the topic. The first public exhibition to focus on connecting architecture and fashion was curated by Susan Sidlauskas in 1982 for MIT’s Hayden Gallery and titled “Intimate Architecture: Contemporary Clothing Design”. Brooke Hodge cited “Intimate Architecture” as an inspiration for her exhibition, but in an interview she acknowledged that the exhibition did not include architecture and similarly, that “The Fashion of Architecture” included very little. She said, “Skin + Bones is the first exhibition to examine the relationship between fashion and architecture in great depth with numerous examples from both fields.”<sup>19</sup> Since the topic is relatively new, the comparison of these exhibitions is indicative of its evolution. As the investigation of the relationship between architecture and fashion continues to develop, exhibitions bring them closer together to inspire a

more thorough exploration. While “Skin + Bones” was not the first exhibition to display a significant amount of architectural works alongside examples from fashion, it was the first to do so in such a way as to create a more engaging dialogue. The 2004 exhibition “Glamour: Fashion, Industrial Design, Architecture” at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art displayed a large number of works from both industries, but connected them through their mutual interest in glamour. On the other hand, one of the most recent exhibitions of architecture and fashion paired architects with fashion designers in teams of two to create designs to be displayed. “Fashion & Architecture” at the Amsterdam Architecture Center was on display in 2010 and truly brought the two fields together, creating a venue for further advancement of such investigations.

As indicated by all of the major writings on the topic, architecture has historically been accepted as having a more significant artistic and intellectual status than fashion. Architects and architecture scholars often deny that fashion, as a discipline, is architecture’s peer and ideological equal. In an interview with Bradley Quinn architectural theorist Charles Jencks said, “Fashion is all froth. It has no real convergence with architecture, it is merely an overlap.”<sup>20</sup> Jencks expresses the sentiment of many people within his field, but as scholars continue to investigate the relationship between architecture and fashion, those within architecture are beginning to acknowledge fashion’s importance. Quinn writes, “While historians and academics may challenge fashion’s claim to be a legitimate art form or a valid discipline of the arts, no one can deny the profound impact it has on the arts, as well as architecture, photography, cinema and other types of design.”<sup>21</sup> The influence of fashion on other art forms continues to grow as architects turn toward it for inspiration.

The use of fashion as an architectural inspiration has been slowly accepted because of the level of elitism that exists in the field of architecture. To call a work of architecture “fashionable”

is an insult to the architect and the artistry of their ideally timeless creation. If the goal of architecture is to be timeless, the rapidly changing styles of the fashion world are viewed as threats. Clothing is produced quickly and the cycle of changing styles is constantly in motion. In contrast, buildings are constructed in much longer periods of time and, as lasting structures, are often designed to stand the test of time. For this reason, architects and architectural scholars have traditionally considered their field to be exempt from the fashion system, which to them is both trivial and temporal. However, Mark Wigley provides evidence for the influence of the rapidly changing fashion system on the Modernist movement, which was defined by its aspiration to achieve timelessness. He compares the white wall to a coat that, when no longer clean and ideal, completely takes away from the building's architectural success. Wigley writes, "Modern architecture – and, likewise, its historiography, cannot detach itself from what it emphatically defines as its degenerate other," that being fashion.<sup>22</sup> Today architects and architectural scholars are working to root out such elitism in architecture. Quinn comments on this effort, explaining, "Architects Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos state that 'the architect is going to be the fashion designer of the future' – a move for architecture to become more populist and less elitist."<sup>23</sup> As the two fields interact more frequently and on deeper levels, architecture comes closer to viewing fashion as its equal.

In addition to collaboration with architecture, the growing acceptance of fashion as an art form has allowed it to be seen as discipline on the same level. However, the labeling of architecture as art is very circumstantial and applying this same categorization to fashion is continually contested. Early on Susan Sidlauskas equated the fashion designer with the architect when she wrote in her catalogue for "Intimate Architecture: Contemporary Clothing Design" in 1982,

“The expressive tools that are a traditional part of the designer’s trade coexist with a preoccupation for solving spatial and structural problems more commonly expressed in architecture. These artists view and design clothes to contain and define space. Their skills are those of builders rather than decorator...the structural decisions (cut, seams, darts, pleats) compose the decoration.”<sup>24</sup>

She identifies the intersections between the two professions and cites the intellectual aspects of the design process as the evidence that warrants calling fashion designers and architects artists. Traditionally, the art world has struggled with this notion, as architects and fashion designers are the producers of buildings and clothing. Architecture and fashion have the capability of falling under art historian Irving Lavin’s definition of art, which states, “Anything manmade is a work of art, even the lowliest and most functional object.”<sup>25</sup> The extent to which a building or garment is man made depends on the particular object being created. It is through the design process, attention to detail, and quality in construction that these basic elements of daily life are heightened to art forms. At the same time, there are many levels of the design and construction processes, from those of the architect designed building or the hand-made couture dress to the production of the prefabricated house or the mass-produced t-shirt. As a result, the circumstances under which a building or garment is made determine whether or not it is considered to be art.

Both architecture and fashion make such distinctions between “high” and “low” works produced by their field. “High” architecture, that which is designed by an architect, and “high” fashion, or haute couture made by a fashion designer, are more readily accepted as art forms often because they are the work of one designer, or artist. Quinn comments on this phenomenon in relation to architecture, writing, “It is interesting to note that among architects, some structures are debased to the category of mere ‘buildings’, while historic monuments, iconic structures and the edifices acknowledged as poetic gestures are accepted as ‘architecture’.”<sup>26</sup> The fact that these distinctions are made in both architecture and fashion unites the two fields, as each grapple with

making art and producing consumable products. Fausch explains that architecture and haute couture “are situated between economic and symbolic/artistic fields, that they have similar conditions of production – team work, use of a model, etc. – and similar conditions of consumption, in which the distinctiveness of the original product is wasted away through diffusion.”<sup>27</sup> The closer a building or garment is to being designed and produced by one person, the more likely it is to be considered art. However, architects and fashion designers must make designs that can be produced, marketed, and sold in the most efficient and least costly manner possible. This relates back to “high” and “low” works in each field. Architects and fashion designers draw on specific influences to work through the design process with the intent of engaging intellectually to solve problems by drawing on theoretical principles, maintaining an awareness of historical precedents, and utilizing their talent and a set of skills that is unique to their profession. Their designs are created as works of art. Quinn writes, “No longer just spaces for living, working or wearing, architecture and fashion seem to engage on an equal footing with the philosophical, historical and formal principles once reserved for art practice alone.”<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, because they are basic elements of survival, buildings and clothing must be available to everyone and in order to achieve this, their artistic quality is at times compromised. In this way, the “low” forms of architecture and fashion are produced, usually by a large team of collaborating professionals and a process of mass production.

The art created by architects and fashion designers influences the aesthetics of the supposed lower levels of building and clothing production. The trickle down of styles in the fashion industry is very apparent, with the most affordable and widely available brands of clothing mimicking the styles that are shown on the runways of Paris, New York, London, or Milan. Unlike the clothing presented on the runway the clothing worn by a majority of the



population represents the work of countless individuals and cannot be attributed to any single designer, or artist. It is designed systematically, through the collaboration of multiple professionals and then sent to a factory to be manufactured. Throughout the process, the focus is on producing an item to be sold. While a certain amount of artistry and artistic integrity are maintained, the goal is not to create a work of art. As a result, garments created through this process are not considered to be art.

The categorization of fashion as art or product is not nearly this cut and dry though. Many garments fall on the spectrum somewhere between haute couture and a pre-packaged t-shirt. Additionally, all clothing is made as a product intended to be sold, including the garments that are designed by a fashion designer who considers their work to be an art form. Often designs are adjusted for production, making the art versus product issue even more concerning for fashion designers. Architects are faced with the same problem, designing buildings according to their clients' wishes, structural and economic constraints, and legal requirements, while attempting to maintain their own artistic and theoretical ideals. Furthermore, architecture, like fashion, is produced by multiple individuals, including architects, engineers, contractors, and builders, among others. Similarly, there is a spectrum of buildings ranging from the most artistic expression of one architect to the assembly of prefabricated structures created by a construction corporation. Through this analysis a commonality between the forms of architecture and fashion that are more readily accepted as art becomes apparent, that being the role of the individual artist. While certain buildings and garments that are not designed by one architect or fashion designer are considered to be works of art, these are the exceptions to the standard, established by the art world's obsession with the "creative genius." Consequently, it is not surprising that during the

last century certain architects and fashion designers have achieved an iconic status both within their field and in popular culture.

While those within the field of architecture know the names of numerous influential architects, especially those of whom it is considered necessary to study in order to fully understand and appreciate the discipline, only certain architects are recognized by people who do not have a strong background in the field. These individuals have transcended the constraints of their professional world and have become household names. The same phenomenon occurs in fashion. Those within the industry recognize countless names of designers and despite the fact that fashion reaches an even wider audience than architecture, a comparatively small portion of fashion designers are known by those outside of the field. These fashion designers, like their architect counterparts, have reached the status of icon. The construction of these icons is a complex process that is unique in each individual case.

In its very basic definition, an icon is “an image; a representation.”<sup>29</sup> When used to describe a person, an icon is defined as “one who is the object of great attention and devotion; an idol,”<sup>30</sup> as well as “a person or thing regarded as a representative symbol of something.”<sup>31</sup> By applying the term “icon” to architects and fashion designers, there is an implication of this attention and devotion. It is through such devotion that the iconic architect or fashion designer is, in a sense, made holy or deified. Thus, there is a connection with the religious definition of “icon,” which primarily refers to a devotional object. According to Byzantine tradition, an icon is a representation of Christ, the Virgin, or saints that “was perceived as matter imbued with *charis*...or divine grace.”<sup>32</sup> The image of the divine was understood as an imprint, or “a typos impressed on material surface,”<sup>33</sup> and the presence of the holy figure, represented in this image was believed to exist in the icon. Icons in architecture and fashion function similarly, as a certain

representational quality or image of the individual is highlighted and used to signify them. The dynamic identity of the designer or architect is indicated by their presence in their iconic status.

In this way, the iconic status acts as a signifier and the icon, the individual, is the signified object. For this reason, the semiotic understanding of icons and what it is to be iconic provides insight into the way in which these artists are received both within their field and by the general public. Semiotician Daniel Chandler defines “iconic” as a “mode in which the signifier is perceived as resembling or imitating the signified (recognizably looking, sounding, feeling, tasting or smelling like it) - being similar in possessing some of its qualities.”<sup>34</sup> In the case of iconic architects and fashion designers, their iconic status imitates the true person and their legacy by establishing an idealized and exaggerated version of the individual. The iconic status focuses on those qualities that have built their reputation and fame. It almost flattens the person by removing the various layers of their identity and reducing them to a specific set of characteristics or accomplishments for which they are remembered. The icon is an abstracted and idealized version of the individual. As a group, these icons act as signifiers as well, representing the idea of iconicity. To call an architect or a fashion designer an icon of their field relates back to the religious sense of the term by implying a certain amount of devotion and divine-like status.

In order for an individual to be considered an icon there must be recognition by an audience, which in this case includes members of either of the two fields and the general public. Without the participation of this audience, there is no one to idolize or pay devotion to these icons. It is the response of their audience that has built their iconic status. They have earned themselves notoriety and hold a certain amount of significance within their field, for which they are respected. These individuals represent their profession, participating in the construction of the image of the architect or fashion designer. As the most recognized names in their fields, there

is a general understanding that these icons are the best in their profession. It is often challenging to identify the reason for an icon's recognition by both members of their field and the general public. By investigating this phenomenon, through the examination of multiple examples, it might be possible to reach new conclusions about the relationship between architecture and fashion and their connections with society and the art world.

The four architects and four fashion designers selected to represent the countless icons in each field demonstrate the qualities associated with such figures. Each individual has earned the respect of their colleagues and is recognizable, on some level, by the general public. Most often, these icons were innovators, having a lasting impact on their field. When combined, their careers span the length of the past century. For this reason, the representation of a range of time periods was favored, in addition to a variety of backgrounds and approaches to their fields. Due to the sheer number of iconic architects and fashion designers, many were not included. Among those not selected are equally significant individuals who would have served as excellent examples. The eight included, though, are intended to provide unique perspectives about architects and fashion designers in order to demonstrate the diversity of icons in each field.

The list includes Frank Lloyd Wright, Coco Chanel, Christian Dior, Philip Johnson, Yves Saint Laurent, I. M. Pei, Frank Gehry, and Alexander McQueen. It has been arranged chronologically to demonstrate the change over time in the way that icons have developed and to encourage comparison to earlier examples. In addition, the list encourages the pairing of one architect and one fashion designer. As a result, Frank Lloyd Wright and Coco Chanel are paired, both established as the most iconic in their fields and representing the archetypes of iconic architects and fashion designers. Christian Dior and Philip Johnson were innovators, constantly changing their aesthetic. In spite of this fundamental similarity, their pairing encourages making

contrasts between a shy fashion designer with a short career and a very public architect who practiced for decades. Yves Saint Laurent and I. M. Pei demonstrate the blending of successful artistic expression with business practice, although Saint Laurent relied on a business partner. Finally, Frank Gehry and Alexander McQueen are two examples of individuals who blur the lines between their professional work and art, having created provocative and often sculptural designs.

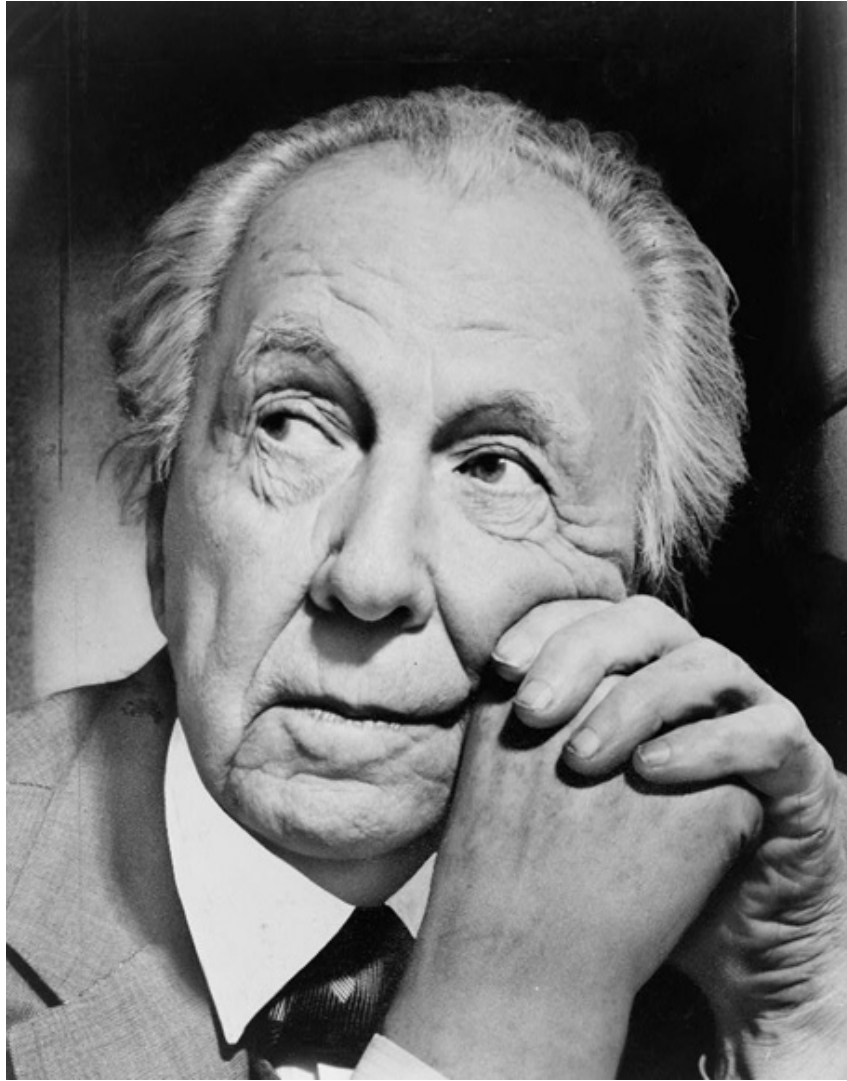
The comparison between the critical and popular receptions of these icons relates to the art and product duality that is inherent in both fields. It is important to consider how iconic architects and fashion designers have handled this duality and whether they are recognized for creating art, products, or both, or whether they have become iconic for reasons independent of their work. Each of the eight icons represents a certain moment in the histories of architecture and fashion. For example, Frank Lloyd Wright is considered to be the father of American modernism and one of, if not the greatest American architects, but is also known for his strong and unchanging opinions and controversial personal life. When the question “Who is Frank Lloyd Wright” is posed, the response will vary greatly. In this way, Wright provides an example of the challenge in analyzing the creation of an icon. At the same time, an examination of his iconic status provides a view of the values of architecture and the interests of society during his time. These conclusions can be applied to any iconic architect or fashion designer. As one of the newest icons of fashion, is Alexander McQueen known for his outrageous designs or his untimely suicide? What does his career reveal about the fashion industry during the past two decades. Many were quick to call his work art, but how wearable was it? Such questions dig at the issues that relate fashion and architecture. Through a series of studies of these eight icons, I

intend to provide a new perspective on the complicated relationship between architecture and fashion.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Brooke Hodge, *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture* (Los Angeles: <sup>2</sup> Bradley Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture* (New York: Berg, 2003), 15
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup> Hodge, *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture*, 7
- <sup>5</sup> Hodge, *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture*, 12
- <sup>6</sup> Hodge, *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture*, 14
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Hodge, *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture*, 15
- <sup>9</sup> Hodge, *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture*, 7
- <sup>10</sup> Deborah Fausch, *Architecture in Fashion* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994), 7
- <sup>11</sup> Mary McLeod, “Undressing Architecture: Fashion, Gender, and Modernity” in Fausch, *Architecture in Fashion*, 39
- <sup>12</sup> Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), xix
- <sup>13</sup> Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses*, xviii
- <sup>14</sup> Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture*, 36
- <sup>15</sup> Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture*, 133
- <sup>16</sup> Hodge, *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture*, 20
- <sup>17</sup> Hodge, *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture*, 11
- <sup>18</sup> Hodge, *Skin + Bones: Parallel Practices in Fashion and Architecture*, 21
- <sup>19</sup> Sarah Scaturro, “Skin + Bones: An Interview with Brooke Hodge,” *Fashion Projects*, March 11, 2007, <http://www.fashionprojects.org/?p=85>
- <sup>20</sup> Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture*, 8
- <sup>21</sup> Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture*, 137
- <sup>22</sup> Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses*, xxv
- <sup>23</sup> Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture*, 40
- <sup>24</sup> Fausch, *Architecture in Fashion*, 128
- <sup>25</sup> Irving Lavin, “The Crisis of Art History,” *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 78 no. 1 (1996): 15
- <sup>26</sup> Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture*, 8
- <sup>27</sup> Fausch, *Architecture in Fashion*, 15
- <sup>28</sup> Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture*, 136
- <sup>29</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4 ed. (2000) “icon”
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2 ed. (2005) “icon”
- <sup>32</sup> Bissera V. Pentcheva, “The Performative Icon,” *The Art Bulletin* 88, no. 4 (2006): 631
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> Daniel Chandler, “Glossary,” *Semiotics for Beginners*, <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem-gloss.html>

Frank Lloyd Wright



*Figure 1: Frank Lloyd Wright*



Frank Lloyd Wright is undeniably the best-known American architect and he has been since he became an icon more than seventy years ago. Neil Levine, one of the most respected Wright scholars, calls him “the most popular and most celebrated architect of this century.”<sup>35</sup> It could even be argued, though, that in addition to being the most famous architect of the twentieth century, Wright is the most iconic architect in history. During his career, the media focused its attention more on Wright’s personal life and personality than on his work, which has caused his name to be well known. Wright’s buildings, now considered essential in any historical study of architecture, have undoubtedly contributed to his popularity, but the fact that a disconnect of this magnitude exists between the recognition of the man and the knowledge of his work is significant. Throughout his career such words as pioneer, individualist, radical, and iconoclast were used to describe Wright. It is this strong personality that held the media’s attention, as well as Wright’s vibrant personal life, which was constantly public knowledge. An outspoken critic with a famous ego, Wright provided the media with sufficient material and certainly played an active role in the construction of his iconic status.

In an interview with *Look* magazine in 1957, only two years before his death, Wright “agreed on the witness stand that he was the world’s greatest living architect” and in reply to his wife’s comment of, “Frank, you should be modest,” he said, “You forget Olgivanna, I was under oath.”<sup>36</sup> What many, including Wright’s own wife, viewed as a lack of modesty Wright considered mere honesty, having the highest opinion of himself, higher than that anyone within the architecture field or the general public, at least during his lifetime. In 1953 he explained, “Early in life I had to choose between honest arrogance and hypocritical humility. I chose honest arrogance, and have seen no occasion to change, even now.”<sup>37</sup> Wright’s arrogance affected all aspects of his career, from the way he designed buildings to the manner in which he interacted

with clients, and can be seen as one of the driving forces in his rise to fame. This arrogance helped Wright receive recognition and at the same time, caused a considerable amount of negative reaction. As a result, Wright's rise to iconic status is typically seen as a struggle, much like his personal life.

The first buildings Wright designed were met with opposition in the United States, but were quickly hailed in Europe where they had considerable influence on the modernist movement. Despite this success in first decade of the twentieth century, it was tragedy and scandal that initially brought Wright fame. On August 15, 1914, Mamah Borthwick Cheney, the woman with whom he was living, her two children, and four others were killed inside his house, Taliesin, by a servant.<sup>38</sup> The servant then proceeded to burn down the house. This tragedy first placed Wright in the public eye and aside from the success of his Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, which was one of the few buildings in the city to survive an earthquake in 1923 only one year after its completion, it was his domestic life that brought steady media attention. Wright divorced his first wife after returning from Tokyo and ended his four-year marriage to his second wife in 1927 in a suit that lasted two years, during which he and his companion Olga Ivanova were arrested. The details of this scandal were consistently published throughout the two years. After settling the divorce and marrying Olga, "Wright said he hoped to resume his profession without further interruption or notoriety."<sup>39</sup> Early in his career Wright made it clear that he wished to be recognized only for his work as an architect. While the details of his personal life received less attention after his marriage to Olga, Wright's personality would become the focus of popular media, often outshining the success of his architecture.

In the many articles about the details of Wright's divorce, he was consistently referred to as the "internationally-known architect,"<sup>40</sup> both commenting on his fame outside the United

States and suggesting to Americans that he was a significant figure. The extent to which the events were covered by such popular publications as *New York Times* also indicates that there was a building public interest in Wright. Furthermore, he received his first official recognition in 1932 when he was elected as an honorary member to the Prussian Academy of the Arts in Germany.<sup>41</sup> During the time between his marriage and this honor, though, Wright was unable to find work, resulting in foreclosure on Taliesin in 1927.<sup>42</sup> With the help of his friends and former clients, Wright was able to regain possession of his house and restart his business in 1929.<sup>43</sup> Despite this turnaround, Wright was constantly excluded from exhibitions of architecture and was not invited to participate in the Chicago World's Fair of 1933. This omission was met with protest by his peers who considered Wright to have "initiated the modern architectural movement."<sup>44</sup> The *New York Times* reported that writer Lewis Mumford "said that 'a fair without Mr. Wright is an insult,' for he, by 'consensus of opinion,' is the 'foremost architect of modern times.'"<sup>45</sup> The debate caused by Wright's exclusion from the Chicago World's Fair increased the architecture world's interest in his work. Also, when considered alongside his professional turmoil, it led to the media's proliferation of the image of Wright as the struggling architect. Wright played a role in the spread of this image through the publication of his autobiography in 1932, in which, according to one reviewer, he frames his life as "a long fight for the preservation of his 'freedom' and 'individuality'."<sup>46</sup>

Wright's autobiography was also his introduction to the public as a theorist and critic. The same reviewer writes, "The book is filled with unconventional generalizations," citing Wright's description of the majority of American homes as "mere boxes, with smaller boxes inside called rooms."<sup>47</sup> From the beginning, Wright's harsh criticism of the entire field of architecture was met with unease, which was worsened by his insistence on being outspoken. In

an interview in 1932, Wright provided his critique of the state of architecture in general, saying, “The great trouble with our architecture as well as our art is a lack of originality of thought.”<sup>48</sup> Undoubtedly, Wright considered himself to be one of the few, if not the only original thinker among his professional peers.

With his strong opinions about the need for a fundamental change in architecture in order to return the discipline to its status as an art form, the emergence of the term “artist” in descriptions of Wright is not surprising. However, Wright began to be called an artist almost as frequently as he was described as an architect. The widespread use of this label suggests a growing understanding of his work and coincides with his universal recognition. One of the earliest examples is an article from 1932 about Wright’s autobiography in which the reviewer writes, “In everything he says and does he is an artist.”<sup>49</sup> Only six years later, a *Time* article referred to him as “the greatest architect of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.”<sup>50</sup> This acclamation was quickly accepted and easily reused for Wright the artist. It marks the beginning of Wright’s status as an icon, which was cemented by the awards and tributes that followed. In 1940 New York’s Modern Museum of Art held an exhibition that surveyed the careers of Wright and filmmaker D. W. Griffith. This was the first major exhibition of Wright’s work. Art critic Edward Allen Jewell calls Wright and Griffith “creative artists” and notes that the MoMA gives Wright the title of “America’s greatest architect.”<sup>51</sup> One year later, in 1941, Wright received the British Royal Gold Medal for Architecture.<sup>52</sup> Both the exhibition and the award recognized Wright’s ability as an architect, finally allowing the acknowledgement of his work to justify his fame.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s Wright’s iconic status increased as he received countless recognitions and commissions. By the time of his death in 1959 Wright had been awarded, in addition to the Royal Gold Medal for Architecture, the Gold Medal of the American

Institute of Architects in 1949, the Italian Star of Solidarity in 1951, and the Gold Medal of the City of Florence also in 1951, and the Gold Medal Award of the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1953.<sup>53</sup> He was also elected to numerous societies of art and architecture, including the Academie Royal of Beaux Arts of Antwerp, the Academie der Kunst of Berlin, the Royal Institute of British Architects, the National Academy of Design, the American Institute of Decorators, and those in Mexico, Portugal, Uruguay, Cuba, Brazil, and Finland.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, he received honorary degrees from Wesleyan, Princeton University, the University of Venice, and Florida Southern.<sup>55</sup> During the last two decades of his career, and life, Wright was flooded with job offers. In an interview in 1949 Wright said, “There is more work on my tables just ahead than there was during all of the past fifty-six years of my practice in architecture.”<sup>56</sup> Among these commissions was the most publicly recognizable of his buildings, the Guggenheim Museum, completed in 1959. This commission is indicative of the extent to which Wright’s fame had grown.

During this period at the end of Wright’s career he was often called the “poet-architect,” a term that attempted to better indicate his creative and intellectual capacity than the simple label of “artist.” In his review of a television interview with Wright, Jack Gould observed, “There is a lot of the poet in Mr. Wright”<sup>57</sup> and in his review of Wright’s *An American Architecture*, Wayne Andrews wrote, “This poetic architect (he believes that every great architect is necessarily a great poet) is an intransigent individualist.”<sup>58</sup> As both men suggest, Wright’s poeticism was linked to his individualism and it is possibly for this reason that he embraced the title of “poet-architect,” which, like his many other titles, set him apart from his peers. Not only does this idea of poet-architect enforce Wright’s unique characteristic, it justifies his status as an icon. Talbot Hamlin, while reviewing Wright’s book *The Future of Architecture*, explained, “The publication

of a new volume by Frank Lloyd Wright is a measure of the respect, almost the reverence, in which he is held. This nearly universal admiration is a well-earned tribute...to his creative imagination and his sense of the poetry of existence.”<sup>59</sup> Hamin suggests that Wright’s “sense of the poetry” is the source of his artistic ability and creative innovation.

While Wright was celebrated as a creative, his role as a professional was often debated or simply ignored. He was notorious for refusing to make concessions for clients and budgets were often dramatically exceeded. Additionally, despite his many engineering successes, such as that at the Tokyo Hotel, the structural concerns and preservation issues at Fallingwater are infamous. The 1938 *Time* article notes, though, “out of more than 150 clients, only three or four have been seriously dissatisfied over money or anything else.”<sup>60</sup> As Wright’s fame grew, his later commissioners were more likely to accept his ego as a price for his work. In his 1932 interview with Wright, S. J. Woolf commented, “He is too assertive for team-work; too set to change. His positiveness does not fit well into the workings of art organizations, nor does his poetic approach appeal to manufacturers.”<sup>61</sup> Woolf’s early assessment of Wright’s acceptance by art organizations has proven to be incorrect, as demonstrated by countless exhibitions and the permanent display of Wright’s work, such as the interiors at the MoMA. History has shown that Wright is remembered as an artist, rather than a successful businessman. Regardless, he was able to design and see constructed more than 500 buildings.

Wright’s career spanned more than six decades, during which his reception was widely varied. His rise in popularity was slow and segmented, but his name eventually became iconic and today, Wright is an architectural deity. Even after his death Wright was unable to escape the criticism that remained consistent throughout his career. As an individualist and innovator, Wright created unique architecture from the beginning, leaving himself open to the many critics

he inspired. As an outspoken critic himself, possessing a famous ego, Wright was the architect all other architects loved to hate for decades. In 1955 Wayne Andrews commented, “All architects are well aware, keeping up with Frank Wright is a back-breaking assignment.”<sup>62</sup>

Perhaps Wright’s peers not only found his comments to be unfavorable but were also intimidated by his ability to think so far ahead. Early on, writer Geoffrey Baker suggested an idea that has been resurrected multiple times during the five decades since Wright’s death. In his description of Wright’s vision for the future, Broadacre City, Baker, in 1940, questions, “Does this confirm Wright as ‘the world’s greatest living architect’? Or does it suggest that his current importance is dangerously exaggerated?”<sup>63</sup> As Wright’s iconic status has grown, this concern has been voiced repeatedly. Following his death, during the 1960s, there was a rejection of Wright and his teachings by the majority of the architecture world. As styles changed, his influence lost its dominance but his historical importance remained. With a resurgence in academic interest and the development of new perspectives on Wright’s position in history beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Wright has reached a new level of iconic status today.

History has demonstrated that Wright’s works and even the validity of his preeminent status are not the factors that have strongly influenced his legacy. Rather, the greatest influence in the construction of Wright as an icon has been his personality. Wright’s architecture, writing, and impact on the field reflect the characteristic individuality that motivated his outspoken commentary and defined his famous ego. He was unlike any architect of his time and since his death, there has yet to be an architect who possesses the same qualities and abilities as Wright. This will remain true partially because Wright guaranteed that no one would be able to fill his position by constantly maintaining a public image to promote his uniqueness. First introduced to the public as a result of tragedy and scandal, Wright was an entertaining and controversial figure

in whom the media was permanently interested. This attention was not unwarranted, though, as Wright proved himself to be a “poet-architect” capable of creating, theorizing, and writing, and eventually earning the status of architectural deity.



## Notes

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- <sup>35</sup> Neil Levine, *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), xiii
- <sup>36</sup> “A Visit with Frank Lloyd Wright” *Look* 21 (17 September 1957), 31 quoted in Levine, *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright*, xiv
- <sup>37</sup> Jack Gould, “Television in Review: Frank Lloyd Wright a Stimulating, Poetic Figure in Latest of N.B.C.’s Conversation Pieces,” *New York Times*, May 20, 1953, 39
- <sup>38</sup> “Frank Lloyd Wright Dies; Famed Architect Was 89,” *New York Times*, April 10, 1959, 26
- <sup>39</sup> “Wright Weds Olga Ivanova,” *New York Times*, August 27, 1928, 26
- <sup>40</sup> “F.L. Wright and Wife Drop Divorce Suits,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1925, 3
- <sup>41</sup> “Frank L. Wright Honored in Berlin,” *New York Times*, February 2, 1932, 14
- <sup>42</sup> “Frank Lloyd Wright Dies; Famed Architect Was 89,” *New York Times*, April 10, 1959, 26
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> “Architects Debate on Chicago’s Fair,” *New York Times*, February 27, 1931, 13
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>46</sup> “F.L. Wright Tells of His Stormy Life,” *New York Times*, March 30, 1932
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> S. J. Woolf, “A Pioneer in Architecture Surveys It,” *New York Times*, January 17, 1932, 6
- <sup>49</sup> “The Autobiography of a Fighting Architect,” *New York Times*, April 3, 1932, 4
- <sup>50</sup> “Science: Usonian Architect,” *Time*, January 17, 1938,  
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,758888,00.html>
- <sup>51</sup> Edward Alden Jewell, “Modern Museum Opens Two Shows,” *New York Times*, November 13, 1940, 20
- <sup>52</sup> “Frank Lloyd Wright Dies; Famed Architect Was 89”
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>56</sup> Harvey Breit, “Talk with Frank Lloyd Wright,” *New York Times*, July 24, 1949, 11
- <sup>57</sup> Gould, “Television in Review,” 39
- <sup>58</sup> Wayne Andrews, “Of His Own Choosing,” *New York Times*, November 27, 1955, 323
- <sup>59</sup> Talbot Hamlin, “To Be Victoriously Himself,” *New York Times*, November 1, 1953, 7
- <sup>60</sup> “Science: Usonian Architect”
- <sup>61</sup> Woolf, “A Pioneer in Architecture Surveys It,” 6
- <sup>62</sup> Andrews, “Of His Own Choosing,” 323
- <sup>63</sup> Geoffrey Baker, “Wright as Iconoclast,” *New York Times*, November 24, 1940, X10

Coco Chanel



*Figure 2: Coco Chanel*

Mme. Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel is easily the most famous fashion designer in history. She created an image nearly a century ago that still permeates the pages of fashion magazines today, as it is continually replicated and reinvented. This influence was acknowledged by *Time* in 1998 when Chanel was chosen as the only fashion designer for their list “Time 100: The Most Important People of the Century.”<sup>1</sup> Chanel first opened her hat shop in Deauville, France in 1913<sup>2</sup> and today the corporation that is her legacy is one of the strongest forces in the industry, estimated to be worth \$6.22 billion in 2009.<sup>3</sup> Her name has become synonymous with style, luxury, taste, and the best the fashion industry has to offer. Chanel’s role in the building of this empire was essential. Her success was almost immediate and while it was not consistent throughout her career, her influence was and it is still felt today. Chanel was her own muse, embodying the image that she cultivated through her bold individualism. She designed for herself, with many of her garments based on her own clothing choices. As a result, Coco Chanel became a celebrity, known equally for her designs, her image, and her sharp wit. Her personal life, both mysterious and scandalous, was constantly the subject of media attention. Chanel played an active role in garnering the public’s interest by maintained this element of mystery, consistently providing quotable commentary. By the end of her nearly sixty-year career Chanel was the most prominent figure in fashion and today she is deified by nearly everyone who has an interest in her field.

When she opened her shop at 31 rue Cambon in 1914, Chanel “set out to revolutionize women’s clothing.”<sup>4</sup> Even though the couturier never would have considered herself a feminist,<sup>5</sup> her work was strongly connected to the liberation of women during the 1920s, during which she freed women from their corsets and provided comfortable stylish garments. Chanel championed the “poor girl look” by creating a boyish silhouette in jersey, a fabric that had never before been

used in high fashion.<sup>6</sup> This look, which Chanel consistently sported, caught on quickly with wealthy French women impressed by her originality.<sup>7</sup> It was this originality that earned Chanel respect from the fashion world. The influence of the trendy French women who were first to acknowledge Chanel's ingenuity initiated her success. Writer Enid Nemy explained, "Within five years, she was a force to be reckoned with in the world of fashion...By 1924, well-dressed women on both sides of the Atlantic were taken with a Chanel costume."<sup>8</sup> During the 1920s and 1930s, Chanel introduced the tweed suit, the little black dress, the costume jewelry trend, and the pants revolution, among others.<sup>9</sup> All of these style innovations comprised the look of the post-war era, which Chanel almost single-handedly created. It was her spirit of nonconformity and individuality that motivated Chanel to initiate these sweeping changes, mostly to satisfy her own dissatisfaction with the current offerings of fashion.

Chanel openly allowed her designs to be copied and sold at significantly lower prices, providing widespread access to the "Chanel look." She said, "Let them copy, my ideas belong to everyone. I refuse no one."<sup>10</sup> This approach to fashion is an example of not only Chanel's unique perspective but also her ingenuity as a businesswoman. Without copies of her garments, such as the Chanel suit, which had "probably been copied more, in all price ranges, than any other single garment designed by a couturier,"<sup>11</sup> Chanel most likely would not have been as successful or widely recognized. In addition, Chanel seemed to have enjoyed the popularity of her clothing afforded by copies. In 1960 she said, "Thirty years ago I went to dinner at Giro's. I remember counting 23 Chanel dresses in the room. But I was sure of only one: mine. I found that a very pretty compliment."<sup>12</sup> At the same time, Chanel maintained numerous high-profile clients who were glad to pay the full price of an authentic Chanel.

As women in both Europe and the United States eagerly emulated the Chanel look, they turned toward the designer herself for inspiration. As a result, Chanel, through her celebrity status, served as both style maker and image icon. She set the trends with her designs and her personal appearance. Chanel is known for her short dark bob and characteristic strand, or multiple strands, of pearls. The bobbed haircut that she wore throughout her life was the result of an accident. There was an explosion of some gas in her hot water heater that sprayed Chanel with soot one night and, too impatient to wash her long hair, she cut her hair short and tied it in a bow. After appearing at the opera that night with short hair, Chanel launched the bobbed hair craze.<sup>13</sup> In another incident, Chanel started the suntan trend by returning to Paris from the Riviera with bronzed skin, inspiring even those women who considered paleness to be ladylike to tan.<sup>14</sup> She also launched the pants revolution when she wore bell-bottom jersey trousers, for purposes of comfort, during a trip to Venice<sup>15</sup> and began the trend for trench coats when she wore a men's trench coat to the races.<sup>16</sup> With the ability to inspire the fashion decisions of countless women by simply wearing a specific garment or haircut, Chanel's status as an icon was undeniable as early as the 1930s.

Chanel's uncertain past and famous relationships played an integral role in raising her to the status of icon, establishing her as a mysterious figure and emphasizing her individuality. She was born Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel outside Paris in 1883 and became an orphan at the age of six.<sup>17</sup> "Coco," meaning "Little Pet," was her nickname from birth.<sup>18</sup> However, the year of her birth is uncertain, as "Chanel herself added yearly, and with somewhat pixyish glee, to the tangle of dates, places and names. Her age was never proved – 'A woman has the age she deserves,' she used to say."<sup>19</sup> Chanel ensured that the details of her past remained unclear, further separating herself from the traditional. At the age of 16 she left the care of her two aunts, supposedly to be

with Etienne Balsan, a millionaire cavalry officer,<sup>20</sup> although she most likely did not meet him until at least a year later. It is known that Chanel lived with the sisters at the convent in Moulins when she was seventeen.<sup>21</sup> During this time she tried a career as a cabaret singer, which is most likely how she met Balsan and became his “backup mistress”.<sup>22</sup> It was with his help that Chanel launched her career in fashion when she opened her first hat shop.<sup>23</sup> She moved on from Balsan, though, to his friend Arthur “Boy” Capel, who, according to friends, was “the only man she really loved.”<sup>24</sup> Capel provided financial support for Chanel’s move from hats to clothing.<sup>25</sup> It is the nature of her relationships with Capel and Balsan that have inspired the rumor that Chanel used sex to become successful, a suggestion that was perpetuated by the movie about her life *Coco Before Chanel*<sup>26</sup>. These two relationships were only the beginning. Following Capel, who left her to marry and was killed in an accident, Chanel was involved with a poet named Paul Reverdy, the Second Duke of Westminster, and a satirical cartoonist named Iribe.<sup>27</sup> Her most controversial relationship was with Hans Gunther Von D, a Nazi spy living in occupied Paris during WWII.<sup>28</sup> Even though she closed her business and did not reopen until fifteen years later, Chanel maintained her residence at the Ritz Carlton in Paris throughout, partially due to her relationship with the Nazi officer.<sup>29</sup>

The source of Chanel’s wealth that allowed her to sustain her luxurious lifestyle for decades was her incredibly successful perfume, Chanel No. 5, which is still sold today. Developed with a perfumer from the Riviera, the perfume was released in 1922 and named after Chanel’s lucky number.<sup>30</sup> The scent quickly became the most famous perfume in the world and even though she sold the perfume subsidiary in 1924, Chanel received a royalty on every bottle.<sup>31</sup> Not only did the perfume provide a source of income for Chanel, it also helped keep her name in the public’s minds while she was on a hiatus from the profession. Ingrid Sischy writes,

“One could say perfume helped keep Chanel’s name pretty throughout the period when her reputation got ugly: World War II.”<sup>32</sup> As Sischy suggests, Chanel’s association with a Nazi officer had a strong negative impact on her reputation and it was most likely the success of Chanel No. 5 that provided the possibility for her return to fashion in the 1950s.

Chanel showed her first collection after a fifteen-year break on February 5, 1954, “roused into action it is said by irritation of seeing Paris taken over by men designers.”<sup>33</sup> Her collection was a reintroduction of the same look that had earned her praise and respect during the 1920s and 1930s. Despite an indifferent critical reaction, the clothing sold. Nemy explains, “Chanel had always been considered a rebel and people expected shocks. Instead, Chanel, as always, was simply extending and developing the shapes that satisfied her.”<sup>34</sup> The success of Chanel’s designs and the widespread adaptation of her image were once again immediate. She earned the loyalty of the same clientele and continued to allow her clothing to be copied. By 1961 a *New York Times* article called Chanel “one of the world’s most famous women.”<sup>35</sup>

Aside from her well-known image, which remained the same as Chanel continued to wear her dark bobbed hair and pearls, the couturier was also known for her open criticism of anyone involved in fashion who she deemed “vulgar”. During her later years Chanel became increasingly candid about her opinions. She once told prominent fashion designer Christian Dior, “I adore you, but you dress women like armchairs.”<sup>36</sup> In 1963 she provided an assessment of the industry, saying, “Balenciaga is the only designer I admire. You say Saint-Laurent is staying small...good. Cardin has talent, but he makes too many shocks.”<sup>37</sup> It was this outspoken nature that maintained the spirit of Chanel’s image as “the fashion rebel of the Nineteen Twenties”<sup>38</sup> throughout her career. Even the former First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, a cultural and fashion icon in her own right, was not exempt from Chanel’s judgment. In an interview with the

*International Herald Tribune* Chanel said, “She’s got horrible taste and she’s responsible for spreading it all over America.”<sup>39</sup> While such comments caused some to form negative opinions about Chanel during her later years, they affected neither her success nor her legacy. Most people shared the belief of American designer Rudi Gernreich who addressed Chanel’s commentary about Kennedy, explaining, “I’m not in agreement with Chanel, but because she’s such a fantastic woman, I respect her too highly to comment.”<sup>40</sup>

It is this respect that defines Chanel’s legacy, often transcending admiration and manifesting itself as deification. In 1957 Neiman Marcus awarded her as the most significant designer of the previous fifty years.<sup>41</sup> Since her death four films have been produced about the couturier, including *Chanel Solitaire* in 1981, the television movie *Coco Chanel* in 2008, *Coco Before Chanel* in 2009, and *Coco Chanel & Igor Stravinsky* also in 2009. In the year before her death, 1970, a musical about Chanel’s life titled *Coco* was produced on Broadway and starred Katherine Hepburn.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, countless biographies, textbooks, and novels have been written about Chanel. Clearly the world’s continues to be fascinated with this iconic designer.

While fashion designers are called and often refer to themselves as artists, Chanel was the first person to refuse this title for herself. She explained, “I am no artist. I want my dresses to go out on the street.”<sup>43</sup> Chanel was never focused on the artistic expression of fashion. Instead, she was interested in creating wearable garments that spoke to her taste and ideas about style. Furthermore, she actively allowed her creations to be copied, completely going against the traditional belief that all art must be original and that originals are the intellectual and creative property of the artist. This belief is equally important in fashion. In many ways Chanel was a stylist, cultivating an image by drawing inspiration from preexisting fashions and only making slight modifications to her designs during her lengthy career. However, like an artist, she created



with her hands, working directly with the fabric.<sup>44</sup> More important than Chanel's status as an artist was her ability as a businesswoman. It is in this facet of her career that Chanel's intellectual ability shone. Sischy explained, "Something that Chanel can never be accused of is not using her brain. Her sharp mind is apparent in everything she did, from her savvy use of logos to her deep understanding of the power of personality and packaging, even the importance of being copied."<sup>45</sup> Chanel was able to balance the artistic side with the business aspect of her profession, but her success owes much more credit to latter.

Coco Chanel's status as an icon has undoubtedly been sealed by the unprecedented success of her namesake brand, which continues to maintain the public's interest in its founder today. It was her innovative mind and unmatched foresight that paved the road for the Chanel brand to grow into a fashion empire. Within only several years of starting her business Chanel had become an icon and she worked hard to ensure that her status was upheld for the entirety of her sixty-year career. Like Frank Lloyd Wright, Chanel's individualism, defined by her innovative mind, rebellious character, and outspoken personality, set her apart from her peers. Fashion designer Miuccia Prada explained, "She was really a genius. It's hard to pin down exactly why, but it has something to do with her wanting to be different and wanting to be independent."<sup>46</sup> Most importantly, the construction of Chanel's icon was largely perpetuated by a specific product, her perfume Chanel No. 5. Sischy writes, "Probably the single element that most ensured Chanel's being remembered, even when it would have been easier to write her off, is not a piece of clothing but a form of liquid gold-Chanel No. 5."<sup>47</sup> The perfume has allowed the name Chanel to remain in the vocabulary of the general population since its introduction more than eighty years ago. Today, that name also conjures an image of an effortlessly chic woman with short bobbed hair wearing pearls, the same image associated with Chanel during her reign

over the fashion industry. Just a mention of Coco Chanel incites the respect reserved for a deity from those who have any knowledge about fashion.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Ingrid Sischy, "The Designer Coco Chanel," *Time*, Monday June 8, 1998, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,988494,00.html>
- <sup>2</sup> Enid Nemy, "Fashion Was Her Pulpit," *New York Times*, January 11, 1971, 35
- <sup>3</sup> Lauren Sherman, "World's Most Powerful Luxury Brands," *Forbes*, May 1, 2009, <http://www.forbes.com/2009/05/01/powerful-luxury-brands-lifestyle-style-luxury-brands.html>
- <sup>4</sup> "Mlle Gabrielle Chanel Famous French Fashion Designer," *Times*, January 12, 1971, 14
- <sup>5</sup> Sischy, "The Designer Coco Chanel"
- <sup>6</sup> "Chanel, the Couturier, Dead in Paris," *New York Times*, January 11, 1971, 35
- <sup>7</sup> Nemy, "Fashion Was Her Pulpit"
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> "Mlle Gabrielle Chanel Famous French Fashion Designer"
- <sup>10</sup> Nemy, "Fashion Was Her Pulpit"
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> "High Priestess of High Fashion: Gabrielle Chanel," *Time*, August 22, 1960, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,869848,00.html>
- <sup>13</sup> Nemy, "Fashion Was Her Pulpit"
- <sup>14</sup> "High Priestess of High Fashion: Gabrielle Chanel"
- <sup>15</sup> "Modern Living: Chanel No. 1," *Time*, January 25, 1971, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,904672,00.html>
- <sup>16</sup> "High Priestess of High Fashion: Gabrielle Chanel"
- <sup>17</sup> "Modern Living: Chanel No. 1"
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Nemy, "Fashion Was Her Pulpit"
- <sup>20</sup> "Modern Living: Chanel No. 1"
- <sup>21</sup> Sischy, "The Designer Coco Chanel"
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Nemy, "Fashion Was Her Pulpit"
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> Sischy, "The Designer Coco Chanel"
- <sup>26</sup> Mary Pols, "Coco Before Chanel: The Making of a Fashion Icon," *Time*, September 23, 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1925784,00.html>
- <sup>27</sup> Rachel Billington, "Corsets were Gone Forever," *New York Times*, November 2, 1975, 289
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Sischy, "The Designer Coco Chanel"
- <sup>30</sup> Nemy, "Fashion Was Her Pulpit"
- <sup>31</sup> "High Priestess of High Fashion: Gabrielle Chanel"
- <sup>32</sup> Sischy, "The Designer Coco Chanel"
- <sup>33</sup> "Mlle Gabrielle Chanel Famous French Fashion Designer"
- <sup>34</sup> Nemy, "Fashion Was Her Pulpit"
- <sup>35</sup> "Portrait of a Designer," *New York Times*, July 29, 1961, 7
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> "People: Jul. 12, 1963," *Time*, July 12, 1963, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,940300,00.html>

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<sup>38</sup> “Portrait of a Designer: Coco Chanel”

<sup>39</sup> “Chanel in Dig at Mrs. Kennedy’s Taste,” *New York Times*, July 29, 1967, FS14

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Nemy, “Fashion Was Her Pulpit”

<sup>42</sup> “Chanel, the Couturier, Dead in Paris”

<sup>43</sup> “Modern Living: Chanel No. 1”

<sup>44</sup> Nemy, “Fashion Was Her Pulpit”

<sup>45</sup> Sischy, “The Designer Coco Chanel”

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Christian Dior



*Figure 3: Christian Dior*

During his ten-year career, cut short by his untimely death, Christian Dior reigned over the fashion industry. His influence on the production of garments throughout the world was unmatched by any previous fashion designer and began with his very first line. Dior's introduction as an independent designer in 1947 was marked by his launching of the New Look, which revolutionized the industry and brought him fame almost overnight.<sup>1</sup> Fashion Editor of *L'Express* Françoise Giroud commented on the phenomenon, saying Dior was "unknown on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February, 1947, famous on the 13<sup>th</sup>."<sup>2</sup> His regular adjustment, and at times dramatic reinvention, of hemlines and silhouettes sent everyone from buyers and manufacturers to consumers scrambling to adhere to the new fashion. While not every season's line was fully accepted, with some even rejected by the public, Dior's impact was felt worldwide and his status as the "dictator" of fashion remained undisputed for the ten years of his career. Known also as "monarch of the haute couture" and "tyrant of the hemlines," Dior "branched out faster and further than any other couturier ever had."<sup>3</sup> Today, the company that is his namesake is one of the leading luxury brands in the fashion industry, estimated to be worth about \$25.4 billion with 235 boutiques worldwide in 2009.<sup>4</sup> The Dior name has been iconic since the introduction of the New Look in 1947.

Dior did not initially plan to become a fashion designer, despite his displayed interest in the field at a young age, delighting "in designing costumes for his playmates, and in organizing fancy-dress parties."<sup>5</sup> He was punished for drawing the legs of a woman wearing high-heeled shoes on schoolwork. Dior remembered, "Something made me do it in spite of the scoldings. I derived such pleasure from the shapes I drew."<sup>6</sup> Instead of pursuing fashion, his wealthy family pressured him to train as a diplomat in Paris, but by 1928 he decided not to continue his studies.<sup>7</sup> Dior opened a small art gallery, showing such well-known artists as Jean Cocteau, Christian

Bernard, and Salvador Dali, who were obscure at the time. Due to illness, he closed the gallery in 1934 and began making fashion sketches, which, to his surprise, he managed to sell.<sup>8</sup> Dior began working for Robert Piguet in 1938 and Lucien Lelong in 1941, with a year interruption due to service in the war.<sup>9</sup> Dior described finally beginning work as a fashion designer, saying, “At the age of 30 I was about to begin my real existence.”<sup>10</sup> In 1946, Marcel Boussac, the largest owner of textile mills in France, in response to the French Ministry of Production’s lift of cloth rationing as well as concerns about the rising prominence of Italian designers, decided to finance a new French designer.<sup>11</sup> Based on the recommendation of many friends, Boussac chose Dior.<sup>12</sup>

In 1946 Dior spent fifteen days designing what would become one of the most influential fashion lines in history. The New Look of 1947 was immediately praised by the entire industry, sparking an unexpected reaction and starting a fashion revolution. Dior’s success was instantaneous. *Women’s Wear Daily* reported, “A bright new star flashed into the couture filament today when Christian Dior presented the first collection of his house.”<sup>13</sup> Dior presented the Figure 8 silhouette, defined by the extremely full skirt, which was not a possibility during the cloth rationing of World War II. He described his intention of the line, to turn women “into flowers, with soft shoulders, blooming bosoms, waists slim as vine stems, and skirts opening up like blossoms.”<sup>14</sup> Celia Bertin recalled, “An American journalist wrote that ‘M. Dior is the man who can lower forty million hems by lowering his pencil.’”<sup>15</sup> The Editor of *Harper’s Bazaar* explained, “This changes everything.”<sup>16</sup> Dior was completely surprised by the unprecedented response, saying, “My God, what have I done?”<sup>17</sup> While buyers and manufacturers ensured the proliferation of the New Look, its acceptance by the public at first was not as unanimously positive as that by those within the field. Designer Pierre Cardin, who worked as Dior’s chief tailor, remembered, “There were crowds in the street...protests, people who shouted ‘It’s

shameful!”<sup>18</sup> Resistance was even violent in some cases, including women in Paris who “ripped at the full skirts of those who dared to indulge.”<sup>19</sup> During a trip to New York in 1947 Dior was picketed by the Little Below the Knee Club.<sup>20</sup> Despite this negative reaction, the New Look was widely adopted, its objectors changing their minds. The high critical acclaim and extensive press coverage of the collection, in addition to its eventual ubiquitous presence, brought Dior instant fame.

Following the success of the New Look, the fashion industry immediately turned to Dior for equally impactful collections. In his second collection, Dior raised hemlines again, straying from the New Look and shocking buyers.<sup>21</sup> As a result, buyers soon expected the unpredictable from his consistently innovative designs and Dior often delivered. He showed the Scissors silhouette in 1949, the Oval line in 1951, the vertical line in 1951, the Cupola silhouette in 1953, and a number of silhouettes based on letters of the alphabet, most notably his “A” line of 1955 and his second most famous collection, the “H” line of 1954.<sup>22</sup> The presentation of the H line caused almost as much controversy as the introduction of the New Look. In 1954, *Time* magazine reported, “It was the biggest fashion change since the time seven years ago when the same Christian Dior decreed the ‘New Look.’”<sup>23</sup> With the H line, Dior “dropped the waistline to the hips, flattened the bust.”<sup>24</sup> In doing so, he “turned the fashion world upside down.”<sup>25</sup> Skeptical fashion editors and buyers were convinced when the same “boyish look” was presented the next day by Jacques Fath, but Americans were outraged with such celebrities as Marilyn Monroe saying, “I’m not built for any kind of boy’s fashions, so why should I wear them?”<sup>26</sup> However, *Time* predicted correctly, writing, “Despite worry, protest and outright defiance, the ladies would probably do just as they are told. They always had.”<sup>27</sup> Designer and friend of Dior Hubert de Givenchy later commented on the pressure of such high expectations at Dior’s shows,



saying, “Everyone asked Dior every year to do a new Look, because his styles became too quickly too Seventh Avenue...it weighted him down. He was asked to do too much.”<sup>28</sup>

By the introduction of the H line in 1954, Dior had become an icon. Each season his show was the most coveted invitation and his security measures guaranteed that only the correct guests would be in attendance. Both the presentation of credentials and a deposit were required for entrance.<sup>29</sup> Dior’s collections determined the fashion aesthetic, so much so that by 1957, *Time* reported, “Every buyer in the trade has learned that it is unwise to buy in quantity before seeing the collection of Christian Dior.”<sup>30</sup> The true testament to Dior’s influence was the success of his business, especially when compared to that of his competitors. In 1957, while the majority of the couture houses fought to stay open, Dior owned eight companies, producing perfume, sportswear, and stockings in addition to couture and ready-to-wear dresses, which were also made at his New York and Venezuelan branches.<sup>31</sup> During his reign over the industry, the house of Dior produced “more than half of all the high fashions exported by the French.”<sup>32</sup> In 1956, one fashion expert said, “He’s Atlas, holding up the entire French fashion industry.”<sup>33</sup> The industry relied as much on Dior’s successful sales as it did on his influential designs.

Despite the worldwide fame of Dior’s name and his work, the man himself was not nearly as well known outside of Paris. He recalled walking through a picket line of women holding signs with the message “Christian Dior Go Home” in Chicago without being recognized.<sup>34</sup> While he would have been recognized in Paris, Dior was very private and shy, rarely appearing in public.<sup>35</sup> He had a group of close friends, but never found love. The daughter of two of Dior’s friends Francine du Plessix Gray commented, “The sorrow of his life was that he was ungainly, and no one wanted to love him,” and recalled designer Jacques Tiffreau’s explanation, saying, “Tiffreau would say how men went to bed with Dior to advance their

careers.”<sup>36</sup> Dior’s wide audience would have been unaware of this shy side of the “dictator of fashion,” unlike those within the industry. Even though his shyness did not have a negative impact on his image, the unknowing public would have been able to more easily build up the image of Dior as a dictator within his field.

In 1957 Dior died of a heart attack, ending his career after its tenth year. Both the fashion industry and the public were shocked. Cardin explained, “Everyone in Paris was stunned. It was like the president had died.”<sup>37</sup> By this time, Dior had earned the respect of his colleagues and international fame. There were 2,000 people in attendance at his funeral in Paris and an additional 7,000 stood outside the church.<sup>38</sup> There was a service in New York as well that was attended by more than 400 people.<sup>39</sup> Some reports of his death referred to Dior simply as “the creator of the New Look,”<sup>40</sup> and others indicated the iconic status that he had reached, calling him “the richest, most successful Parisian designer of all time.”<sup>41</sup>

After his sudden death, members of the fashion industry began to speculate about who would be chosen to head “the world’s biggest high fashion empire.”<sup>42</sup> This was a dilemma that had not been previously encountered and for this reason, demonstrated the extent of Dior’s unique impact on the field. His biographer Marie-France Pochna explained, “Behind the beautiful dresses and big shows and the ongoing party that was the Dior studio, he was planting the seeds of what would become the modern fashion business.”<sup>43</sup> Like Chanel, he built a legacy that continues today utilizing his skills as a businessman. However, unlike the most famous fashion designer in history, to whom Dior is most likely second, he was interested in the artistry and aesthetics of his profession. As Pochna indicates, Dior changed the course of the fashion industry forever. This lasting influence was Dior’s most important role, securing his status as an icon.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> “France: Dictator by Demand,” *Time*, March 4, 1957,  
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,862458,00.html>
- <sup>2</sup> “Fashion: The Undressed Look,” *Time*, August 13, 1956,  
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,865474,00.html>
- <sup>3</sup> “Dior, 52, Creator of ‘New Look,’ Dies,” *New York Times*, October 24, 1957, 1
- <sup>4</sup> “Christian Dior SA Company Profile,” Yahoo! Finance, <http://biz.yahoo.com/ic/92/92686.html>
- <sup>5</sup> “France: Dictator by Demand”
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Celia Bertin, “New Look at Christian Dior,” *New York Times*, September 5, 1954, SM13
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> “France: Dictator by Demand”
- <sup>11</sup> Bertin, “New Look at Christian Dior,” and “France: Dictator by Demand”
- <sup>12</sup> Bertin, “New Look at Christian Dior”
- <sup>13</sup> Jessica Kerwin, “Dior and after,” *W* 34 (2005): 196(6)
- <sup>14</sup> “France: Dictator by Demand”
- <sup>15</sup> Bertin, “New Look at Christian Dior”
- <sup>16</sup> “France: Dictator by Demand”
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Kerwin, “Dior and after”
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> “Fashions: The New Old Look,” *Time*, February 23, 1948,  
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,798260,00.html>
- <sup>22</sup> Kerwin, “Dior and after” and “Dior: Fashion’s Ten-Year Wonder Leaves Couture Leadership a Question,” *New York Times*, October 25, 1957, 41
- <sup>23</sup> “Foreign News: The Flat Look,” *Time*, August 9, 1954,  
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,936321,00.html>
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> Bertin, “New Look at Christian Dior”
- <sup>26</sup> “Foreign News: The Flat Look”
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> Kerwin, “Dior and after”
- <sup>29</sup> “France: Dictator by Demand”
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> “Fashion: The Undressed Look”
- <sup>32</sup> “Dior: Fashion’s Ten-Year Wonder Leaves Couture Leadership a Question”
- <sup>33</sup> “Fashion: The Undressed Look”
- <sup>34</sup> “France: Dictator by Demand”
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Kerwin, “Dior and after”
- <sup>37</sup> Robert Murphy, “One Legend to Another,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, February 27, 2008, 4B
- <sup>38</sup> “2,000 at Dior Service,” *New York Times*, October 30, 1957, 29

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<sup>39</sup> “Dior Requiem Here,” *New York Times*, October 29, 1957, 31

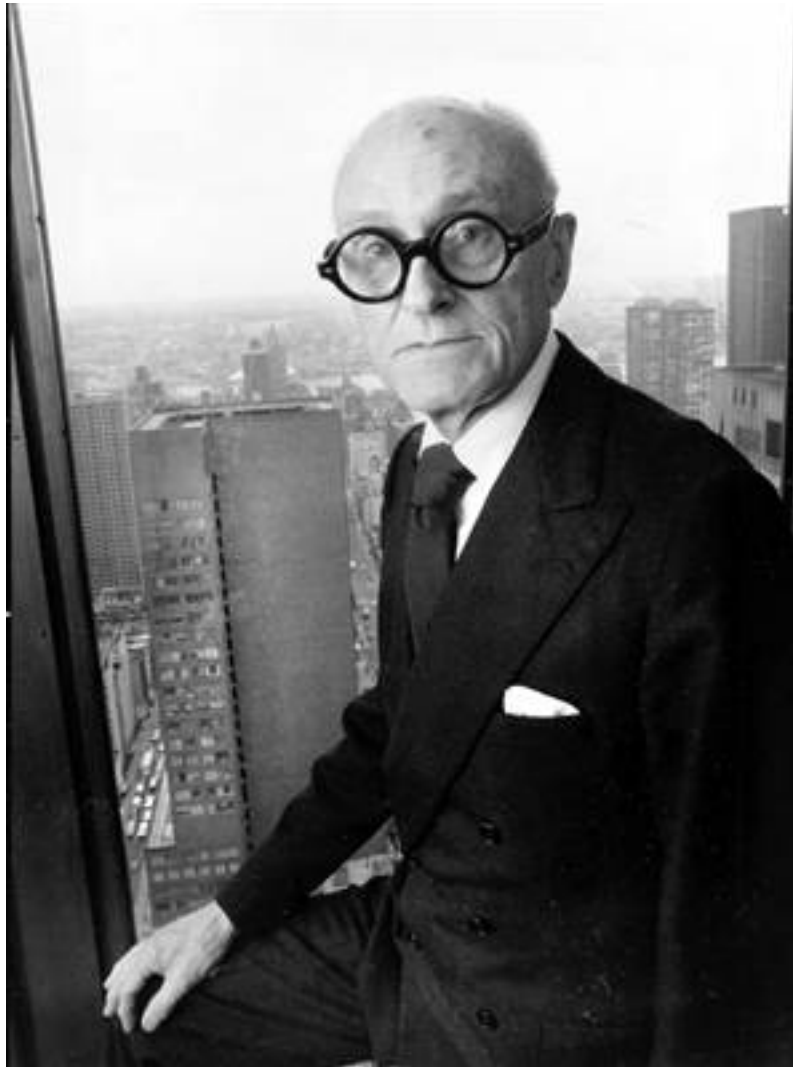
<sup>40</sup> “2,000 at Dior Service”

<sup>41</sup> “Dior: Fashion’s Ten-Year Wonder Leaves Couture Leadership a Question”

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Kerwin, “Dior and after”

Philip Johnson



*Figure 4: Philip Johnson*

Philip Johnson was one of the most influential figures in twentieth century architecture, both as a scholar and architect. He established his significant position in the field at a young age but did not begin practicing as an architect until he was 42 years old.<sup>1</sup> Johnson's experiences provided him with a different perspective than that of his professional peers and allowed him to play a unique role in the field. Architecture critic Paul Goldberger captured the many dimensions of this unique role, writing, "Often considered the dean of American architects, Mr. Johnson was known less for his individual buildings than for the sheer force of his presence on the architectural scene, which he served as a combination godfather, gadfly, scholar, patron, critic, curator and cheerleader."<sup>2</sup> Johnson was first recognized by the architecture world when he "almost single-handedly introduced modern architecture in the United States,"<sup>3</sup> during the beginning of the 1930s. As an architect, his consistently elegant buildings served as a testament to his unmatched taste. In addition, his work was often controversial, earning him such titles as "maverick" and "rebel." It was such controversial works as his famous Glass House, in addition to high profile projects, that exposed Johnson to the public and brought him fame. With constant media attention, the respect of fellow architects, and a profound influence over his field, Johnson became an icon who is remembered for his distinct personality and unique approach to his profession.

After graduating from Harvard in 1927, Johnson traveled through Europe where he met Henry-Russell Hitchcock.<sup>4</sup> Together they toured the buildings designed by the architects of the modern movement, which was only in the beginning of its development. Inspired by their experiences, Johnson and Hitchcock organized an exhibition for the then new Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1932 and published an accompanying book in the same year; both titled "The International Style."<sup>5</sup> Their work introduced Americans to the modern architecture of

Europe and such well-known modernists as Le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Walter Gropius.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Johnson and Hitchcock coined the phrase “International Style,” which became the standard term for the architecture of the modern movement.<sup>7</sup> The subsequent explosion of the International Style in the United States could be traced to Johnson and for this reason, he quickly earned a name for himself in the architecture world as a prominent scholar of the discipline. Johnson’s role as a scholar would remain part of his identity throughout his career and began when he founded the Department of Architecture at the MoMA in 1932, the same year as his influential exhibition.<sup>8</sup> In doing so, he confirmed that architecture is a true art form equally worthy of display in the museum. Franz Schulze, Johnson’s biographer, explained, “In the years he spent as the on-and-off head of the architecture department at the Museum of Modern Art, he did more than anyone to make the study of architecture a museological discipline of the highest order.”<sup>9</sup> Even though he left the MoMA in 1936, Johnson’s influence on the institution’s relationship with architecture was significant, moving “the museum quickly to the forefront of the architectural avant-garde.”<sup>10</sup>

Johnson finally decided to become an architect at the age of 35, enrolling at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1941.<sup>11</sup> His early work was a testament to the influence of his mentor Mies van der Rohe. As “the chief American disciple of Mies,”<sup>12</sup> Johnson continued the trajectory he established as a scholar when he introduced the International Style in the U.S. He designed a number of buildings that are among the most highly regarded later examples of the style, including two of his best-known works, the Seagram Building in New York, designed with Mies in 1958, and his own Glass House of 1949.<sup>13</sup> The attention Johnson received immediately upon the completion of the Glass House made the esteemed architect’s name recognizable by the public. Critic Richard Lacayo wrote that the building “very quickly became one of the most

widely published and talked-about American homes since Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater."<sup>14</sup> It shocked the public with its lack of privacy, leaving any inhabitant completely exposed to onlookers. Fortunately, the inhabitant was Johnson and as his own client, the architect was able to fully realize his vision for the building. As a result, the Glass House has been called "the most resolute statement of modernist principles ever set down in a leafy glade."<sup>15</sup> Such praise has caused the Glass House to become an iconic building in the history of architecture. Its construction would not have been possible, though, without Johnson's wealth.

Raised in a wealthy family, Johnson, unlike most of his colleagues, was affluent throughout his entire life. This wealth played an extremely important role in both his professional and personal lives. It set him apart from other architects because "he did not need to build for a living,"<sup>16</sup> thus alleviating a certain amount of pressure and allowing Johnson to be independent and individualistic, characteristics for which he is remembered. His experimentation with styles was undoubtedly enabled by his wealth.<sup>17</sup> In addition, Johnson's economic standing placed him among the members of upper-class society. Goldberger explained, "Mr. Johnson had lunch daily amid other prominent and powerful New Yorkers at a special table in the corner of the Grill Room of the Four Seasons... In the evenings, he was frequently seen at exclusive social events."<sup>18</sup> As a result of his associations with such well-known public figures, Johnson's fame increased. Goldberger continued, "He was among the few architects whose comings and goings were considered worthy of notice in the gossip columns."<sup>19</sup> Aside from his work within the field of architecture, Johnson himself was a cultural icon. He was associated with the same circle of creative intellectuals as such world-famous artists as Andy Warhol.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to his reputation as one of the major architects of the modern movement, Johnson is regarded for playing an integral role in initiating the shift toward historicism and post-



modernism; a move in direct opposition of the very style he introduced to the U.S.<sup>21</sup> This ability to adapt to different styles is one of the qualities for which he is remembered and is partially responsible for sustaining his more than sixty-year career. It also added to his uniqueness, as Goldberger explained, “unlike many of the movement's early proselytizers, he changed with the times, and his own work showed a major movement away from beginnings that were heavily influenced by Mies.”<sup>22</sup> The major shift in Johnson’s approach was the inclusion of historical forms in contemporary buildings, a technique he developed throughout the remainder of his career.<sup>23</sup> Driven by his famous motto “You cannot not know history,”<sup>24</sup> Johnson began experimenting with reinventing historical styles during the 1950s and 60s. His designs for the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, built in 1961, and the New York State Theater at Lincoln Center of 1964 reflect his interest in Classical elements. Johnson’s turn toward history would later influence the post-modern movement, which became extremely popular in the 1970s and 80s. During this time, he contributed a number of major post-modern works, including the well-known AT&T Building in New York and PPG Place in Pittsburgh, both completed in 1984.<sup>25</sup>

Johnson’s career-long pursuit of historical form in his work demonstrated the influence of his previous career as an architectural scholar and museum curator. Architect and critic Peter Blake wrote in 1962 that Johnson “knows more about the history of architecture than all other U.S. architects rolled into one.”<sup>26</sup> This unmatched knowledge earned him the respect of fellow architects, even though his move toward historical styles was controversial. Critic Ada Louise Huxtable explained, “It is a controversial style, praised as a ‘breakthrough’ by some, damned as ‘decorative’ or ‘reactionary’ by others, who feel that plucking the past is not a genuinely creative act...All agree, however, that the plucking and molding are done with finesse and taste, and often result in effects of exquisite sensibility.”<sup>27</sup> It was this finesse, taste, and “exquisite

sensibility” that defined Johnson’s abilities as an architect and placed him among the best in his profession, making him a legend in the field only twenty years after joining the practice. Huxtable commented on his iconic status in 1965, stating, “He is the Establishment now, a completely accepted architectural leader of unimpeachable authority.”<sup>28</sup>

While Johnson experimented with different architectural styles throughout his career, his motivation and goals remained consistent. In everything that he produced Johnson aimed to create the best possible artistic expression, defined by its beauty. Schulze wrote, “Johnson’s almost involuntary flitting from style to style does not address the one overarching consistency in his approach to the profession—more exactly, to the art. He never stopped believing that the aesthetic dimension was the only admissible measure by which architectural quality could be judged.”<sup>29</sup> Johnson was, for the most part, successful; as the critical consensus was that his buildings were of an unparalleled elegance. Huxtable stated that in some ways his buildings were manifested as “art for art’s sake,” but contended that “beauty is seductive, and so are his buildings.”<sup>30</sup> While at times credited to his artistry, Johnson’s achievement of beauty and elegance was frequently attributed to his incomparable taste, a quality more often associated with fashion designers. Blake wrote, “Johnson’s work is all intelligence, scholarship, faultless taste...it always comes out elegant, supremely sophisticated, full of polish.”<sup>31</sup>

Johnson’s famous taste was as much an integral part of his personal life as it was his professional life. A scholar, connoisseur, and collector of art, he was constantly refining his taste, which defined his exceptional passion for architecture. Critic Sarah Booth Conroy called him “The world’s greatest architecture enthusiast,” explaining, “He is almost as interested in other people’s work as he is in his own. Many younger architects have profited from his support.”<sup>32</sup> Additionally, Goldberger indicated that his lunch meetings with young architects “functioned as

a kind of miniature architectural salon.”<sup>33</sup> Johnson used his iconic status to have a powerful impact on the field by mentoring and influencing the younger generation. It is in this way that he was also an outspoken critic. Huxtable wrote, “He treads on toes gracefully and firmly,” calling, for instance, the Pan Am Building “ruinous; a building nobody wanted.”<sup>34</sup> Considering his quick rise to fame and widespread respect, it is not surprising that Johnson was outspoken about his opinion.

Johnson’s taste was also evident in his personal image, which became a recognizable part of his iconic status. One critic compared his appearance in the 1960s to that of his buildings, writing that he was “the same synergistic combination of simplicity and luxury as his buildings.”<sup>35</sup> Johnson’s image would become increasingly iconic later in life as he was regularly in the public eye. Goldberger explained,

“With his dignified bearing and elegant, tailored suits, he looked every bit the part of a distinguished, genteel aristocrat, but he played the celebrity culture of the 1980’s and 90’s as successfully as a rock star. To the public, he was far and away the best-known living architect, and his crisply outlined, round face, marked by heavy, round black spectacles of his own design, was a common sight on television programs and magazine covers.”<sup>36</sup>

His work was extremely visible in cities throughout the country, especially his well-known large-scale projects, such as the Pennzoil Place tower in Houston and the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California. However, it was the power of his personality, reputation, and image that confirmed Johnson as an icon.

Celebrated for his achievement in the field, Johnson won the first Pritzker Prize in 1979 and the Gold Medal of the American Institute of Architects in 1978.<sup>37</sup> His impact as a scholar was equally important as his work as an architect. Schulze suggested, though, “History will remember Johnson the curator, critic, and historian longer and with greater respect than it will Johnson the architect.”<sup>38</sup> Ultimately, the two aspects of Johnson’s professional life are not

mutually exclusive. He was the scholar architect, a student of historical precedents and connoisseur of contemporary architecture, whose academic sensibility was realized in the design of his buildings. Johnson studied the history of architecture as he moved between styles and drew on varying influences in his work. He said that his approach to tradition was to “improve it, twist it, and mold it; to make something new of it.”<sup>39</sup> Johnson had an extensive influence on the profession, introducing Americans to the International Style, initiating the movement toward post-modernism, and arguing for architecture’s legitimacy as an art form. He was respected by his colleagues and famous in the public’s eye. Architect Robert Stern once said, “He was a center around which we all revolved. We wanted to please him and interest him.”<sup>40</sup>

Philip Johnson in some ways paralleled Frank Lloyd Wright, although his status never reached that of the architectural deity that is Wright. Like Wright, though, he was a unique individual who often critiqued the establishment only to eventually become the establishment. Johnson invited such comparisons to Wright when he stated, “Of course I’m arrogant. It is better to have an honest arrogance than a dishonest humility,”<sup>41</sup> quoting the late Wright. In the public eye, Johnson was famous for two reasons: his associations with the wealthy and famous and his highly visible, often controversial buildings. He sparked the public’s interest by aligning himself with members of New York’s high society and creative intellectuals. Without his influence on the field of architecture Johnson would not have been as memorable. Therefore, there is not one definable reason for his iconic status. Rather, it was constructed by his unique position as an architect, curator, critic, and affluent member of society.

## Notes

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- <sup>2</sup> Paul Goldberger, “Philip Johnson, Architecture’s Restless Intellect, Dies at 98,” *New York Times*, January 27, 2005,  
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- <sup>18</sup> Goldberger, “Philip Johnson, Architecture’s Restless Intellect, Dies at 98”
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- <sup>25</sup> Goldberger, “Philip Johnson, Architecture’s Restless Intellect, Dies at 98”
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<sup>34</sup> Huxtable, "He Adds Elegance to Modern Architecture"

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Yves Saint Laurent



*Figure 5: Yves Saint Laurent*

Yves Saint Laurent was only twenty-one years old when he “stepped out of obscurity”<sup>1</sup> as Christian Dior’s successor after the world famous couturier’s sudden death in 1957, becoming the youngest couturier in history.<sup>2</sup> His first collection for Dior, the Trapeze collection shown in 1958, brought Saint Laurent instant fame.<sup>3</sup> The subsequent collections he designed at Dior established his prominent position in the fashion industry, justifying this fame, which remained throughout his career. His work at Dior, while lasting only three years, earned him the title “boy wonder.”<sup>4</sup> With the establishment of his own couture house in 1962,<sup>5</sup> Saint Laurent went on to have an immense impact on the fashion industry and, on a greater level, the clothing of the twentieth century. It is widely acknowledged that Saint Laurent was one of the “most influential couturiers of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,”<sup>6</sup> and most within the fashion industry agree with journalist Betsy Kroll that “he was as important to 20<sup>th</sup> century fashion as Coco Chanel and Christian Dior.”<sup>7</sup> Fashion editor Susannah Frankel took this even further, writing, “Yves Saint Laurent, more than anyone else, is responsible for informing the way women – and indeed men – dress in the 20th century. (In this respect, only the mighty Coco Chanel comes close and, to those in the know, she was, frankly, nothing but a stylist by comparison.)”<sup>8</sup> While Frankel’s suggestion about Chanel is debatable, the comparison to fashion’s deity demonstrates that Saint Laurent’s influence is not, as it continues to play a role in fashion today. A celebrity of his time and the name of one of the top fashion labels today, Saint Laurent is an icon and has been since the age of twenty-one.

Like his predecessor, Christian Dior, Saint Laurent achieved iconic status immediately upon his public introduction to the fashion industry. His Trapeze collection caused an overwhelming response of support from both those within fashion and the general public. The fashion press declared, “Yves Saint Laurent has saved France.”<sup>9</sup> When the people of Paris



“celebrated in the street,” Saint Laurent, “the boy wonder, tall, handsome, and painfully shy, was thrust out on the balcony of the House of Dior to acknowledge the cheers.”<sup>10</sup> This public display is reminiscent of that which followed Dior’s presentation of the New Look ten years earlier, except Saint Laurent received praise and Dior’s collection was protested. However, Saint Laurent’s Trapeze collection, while significant, was not as revolutionary as the New Look. Critic Anthony Burgess later called the line, “The most original dress concept since Dior’s own New Look of 1947.”<sup>11</sup> It did not have the same lasting effect as Dior’s collection, but it established Saint Laurent’s fame, helping to enable him to later revolutionize the fashion industry.

After Saint Laurent suffered a nervous breakdown upon being drafted for twenty-seven months of military service in 1960, Dior chose to replace him with Marc Bohan.<sup>12</sup> Two years later he opened his own haute couture house with his lover Pierre Bergé, who remained his business partner throughout his almost fifty-year career.<sup>13</sup> J. Mack Robinson, a businessman from Atlanta, provided initial financial support for the company. He had confidence in the investment due to “the excitement Mr. Saint Laurent had created when he replaced Dior.”<sup>14</sup> On January 29, 1962, Saint Laurent debuted the first collection for his new house with great success, establishing the path for his widely celebrated career.<sup>15</sup> Building on his prestige as the chief designer for Dior, Saint Laurent was once again at the top of the industry after his two-year hiatus. Fashion reporter Anne-Marie Schiro explained, “For many years after he opened his own couture house...his collections were eagerly anticipated by fashion enthusiasts, who considered his the final word on that season’s style.”<sup>16</sup> Despite his release from the House of Dior, Saint Laurent essentially filled the role of tastemaker left empty by Dior. He was the new icon of the fashion industry.

Saint Laurent's ascent to "crown prince of the French haute couture,"<sup>17</sup> was quick, as the press began using this title for him within only three years of his first collection for his own house. Years later, as the established leading designer in the industry, he was dubbed "The King of Fashion,"<sup>18</sup> with an influence unmatched by any of his colleagues and was so extensive that scholars cannot agree on his most significant work. Most likely, Saint Laurent's most important contribution to fashion was his introduction of designs inspired by street clothing. Fashion journalist Ruth La Ferla elaborated, "His signal contribution to the world of style was to elevate the lowly and the outré, conferring an aristocratic insouciance on modes of dress...once considered too gritty or exotic for conventional wear."<sup>19</sup> Throughout his career Saint Laurent was inspired by the people he saw on the street, informing many of his most famous pieces and collections. He brought motorcycle jackets, peacoats, safari jackets, and berets to the runway; dressed women in menswear with his famous Le Smoking, or tuxedo; and introduced long tunics, flat shoes, knee socks, and hip boots.<sup>20</sup> Saint Laurent's other major impact was his popularization of pants for women, having been called "the man who put well over a million women into pants."<sup>21</sup> According to him, this "may be his biggest contribution to fashion."<sup>22</sup> Two of his most famous collections are the Mondrian collection of 1965, based on the geometric paintings by the famous artist, and his "rich peasant" collection of 1976, inspired by the clothing worn by Russian women.<sup>23</sup> Both of these collections have proven to have a continued impact since their debut. Taking a more general view, arts editor for *Time* Martha Duffy wrote, "Good tailoring is behind what is truly his greatest influence on clothing."<sup>24</sup> While his career spanned forty-five years, during which he remained at the top of his career, Saint Laurent's "influence was at its height during the 1960s and '70s."<sup>25</sup>

The development of the Yves Saint Laurent brand established the model on which many designers base their businesses today. The success of the House of Yves Saint Laurent surpassed that of any fashion house before it, an achievement that would not have been possible without Bergé. Journalist Gloria Emerson described him as, “The tough, highly intelligent and protective man who is believed to have steered the designer to his present enviable position.”<sup>26</sup> The rapid growth of the YSL brand is largely credited to Saint Laurent’s extensive ready-to-wear business. The company opened its first Yves Saint Laurent Rive Gauche boutique in September of 1966 in Paris’ Saint-Germain-des-Prés.<sup>27</sup> Subsequent boutiques were established throughout Europe and the United States in rapid succession and by Saint Laurent’s retirement in 2002, there were 172 Rive Gauche boutiques around the world.<sup>28</sup> He was “the first of Paris’ great designers to reach for the mass audience,”<sup>29</sup> causing his fame to grow exponentially and establishing his iconic status. He became a household name with the attachment of his label to countless products, including sunglasses, soap, cigarette lighters, and sheets, with fifty-eight bearing the Yves Saint Laurent brand by 1976.<sup>30</sup> The diffusion of the YSL label began with his first perfume, “Y,” which was launched in France in 1964 and in the United States in 1965.<sup>31</sup> Not only did the perfume, in addition to his other products, build on Saint Laurent’s fame, it also extended his celebrity status. In 1971, he posed nude in an advertisement for his men’s cologne “YSL,”<sup>32</sup> causing controversy and ensuring that he would be recognized worldwide. As an indicator of his extensive influence, in recent years Tom Ford and Marc Jacobs, two of the most famous fashion designers today, have appeared nude in advertisements for their brands.

Despite this bold advertising campaign and his very public image as a celebrity, Yves Saint Laurent was known to be shy. Marylin Bender of *New York Times* described Saint Laurent when he succeeded Dior as having a “frightened gazelle manner,” but within a few years of

opening the House of Yves Saint Laurent he had gained confidence.<sup>33</sup> By 1968, he was called “a celebrity’s celebrity,” attracting crowds of supporters to events he attended.<sup>34</sup> Saint Laurent shed light on the reason he retained part of his shy personality throughout his career, commenting in 1983, “I became famous right away, and being shy, I found it difficult to get involved with others. Suffering is a necessary part of the creative process. You transform when you suffer.”<sup>35</sup> As Saint Laurent explained, perhaps it was his initial timidity that allowed him to develop into the highly respected celebrity designer he became. During the height of his career in the 1970s, his celebrity status was so well established that his public image was as closely followed as his work.

Beginning early in his career, Saint Laurent was referred to as an artist and he played an active role in promoting this image. Due to the house’s immediate success, he had a generous amount of freedom in creating his art, as Emerson reported in 1965, “It is certain that the designer can do what he chooses when it comes to clothes.”<sup>36</sup> Saint Laurent considered “himself the last truly creative designer around,” in 1976.<sup>37</sup> As a result, he attempted to represent the art of fashion design to the best of his ability, while acknowledging its highly debated position among other art forms. Burgess reported, “He had no delusions about its comparative lowliness. The word ‘genius’ so often attached to him was an embarrassment.”<sup>38</sup> Despite his refusal of the title “genius,” Saint Laurent’s artistic identity caused many critics and members of the fashion industry to fit him into the art world’s concept of “artistic genius.” The influence of his shy personality and well-known emotional fragility supported the idea of him as a tortured artist, with his own comments, such as “Art is a poison,” justifying his fulfillment of the archetype.

Due to his highly influential career, Saint Laurent was widely recognized and celebrated by a number of organizations. The first exhibition of his work was organized by former editor of Vogue and Harper’s Bazaar Diana Vreeland and the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Costume

Institute in 1983, marking “the first time the museum had honored a living designer.”<sup>39</sup> Vreeland commented, “Saint Laurent has been built into the history of fashion now for a long time,”<sup>40</sup> calling him “a living genius.”<sup>41</sup> He reported that he was “honored”<sup>42</sup> by the retrospective, which, perhaps more than any other event in his life, confirmed his status as an icon. One reviewer called the exhibit “his symbolic coronation as the monarch of fashion.”<sup>43</sup> The success of the retrospective at the MET inspired exhibitions in Paris, Beijing, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Tokyo, and Sydney.<sup>44</sup> Saint Laurent received numerous awards including, the Council of Fashion Designers of America award in 1981, the French Legion of Honor in 1985, and the Council of Fashion Designers of America’s Lifetime Achievement Award in 1999.<sup>45</sup>

Yves Saint Laurent’s iconic status was built on his early introduction, artistic ability, unmatched influence, prosperous business, worldwide fame, and substantial recognition. Receiving praise from such significant figures as the established deity of fashion Coco Chanel, who “proclaimed him as her successor,”<sup>46</sup> Saint Laurent’s critical and public receptions were immediately overwhelming for the designer. Starting in Paris, his prominence grew when New York fully embraced his designs, as Schiro claimed, “It is New York chiefly that has jammed on the crown.”<sup>47</sup> Chanel’s suggestion was not unfounded, since both were inspired traditional clothing and that seen on people in public. In addition, both made the revolutionary introduction pants for women. Saint Laurent is possibly the only fashion designer whose iconic status has approached that of Chanel, with an even greater impact on fashion than that of the original great couturier. He commented on the extent to which his work inspired other designers in 1976, saying, “I was fed up with opening magazines and seeing clothes that I thought were mine but had in fact been done by somebody else.”<sup>48</sup> Unlike Chanel, his approach to designing clothing changed over time. Schiro explained, “Originally a maverick and a generator of

controversy...Mr. Saint Laurent developed into a more conservative designer, a believer in evolution rather than revolution.”<sup>49</sup> However, his status as an icon never changed, evidenced by the massive attendance at his funeral by “the world of French power and glitter” and “the women of Paris who lined the streets behind the police to mourn Mr. Saint Laurent and who stood to watch the big screen that showed the funeral going on inside.”<sup>50</sup> He was an icon who changed fashion and, as journalist Steven Elanger wrote, “Was generally regarded, as...the finest fashion designer of the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>51</sup>

## Notes

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- <sup>4</sup> “Marc Bohan Appointed Dior’s New Designer,” *New York Times*, September 29, 1960, 38
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- <sup>9</sup> Belinda Luscombe, “Beyond Grace,” *Time*, January 21, 2002,  
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- <sup>16</sup> Schiro, “Yves Saint Laurent, Giant of Couture, Dies at 71”
- <sup>17</sup> Marylin Bender, “St. Laurent, Salesman, Visiting Here,” *New York Times*, October 26, 1965, 40
- <sup>18</sup> Burgess, “All About Yves”
- <sup>19</sup> Ruth La Ferla, “The Revolutionary,” *New York Times*, June 5, 2008,  
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- <sup>23</sup> Schiro, “Yves Saint Laurent, Giant of Couture, Dies at 71”
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I. M. Pei



*Figure 6: I. M. Pei*

Ieoh Ming Pei, known simply as I. M. Pei, is unique among iconic architects, especially the group discussed here, because he is one of the few who is perceived to have balanced the artistic and business aspects of the profession. Pei is at once an individual icon with a world famous name and easily identifiable design style, and a committed team player, having managed one of the largest and most successful firms in the field for more than thirty years. His work, both that designed directly by the architect and that produced by his firm, is known for its reliability and artistry. With a career that has spanned more than sixty years and is still not quite over despite his putative retirement of 1990, Pei is considered to be the last modernist, often called “modernism’s elder statesman.”<sup>1</sup> During his extensive career, Pei has become a leader of the architectural field, earning the respect of his colleagues and receiving countless awards. At various times he was considered to be “America’s best architect.”<sup>2</sup> He has had an immense impact on the built environment, as major commissions by Pei Cobb Freed & Partners make their highly visible mark on cities throughout the world. Despite constant praise and international fame, Pei has remained humble throughout his career. This humility has defined his skill as a businessman, affecting his interactions with clients and leadership of his firm. As a result, Pei’s genuine lack of ego has played an important role in guaranteeing his success. It also sets him apart from his more egotistical colleagues, specifically his fellow icons.

Pei began his career in 1948 when the real estate developer Bill Zeckendorf hired him “to create and head an architectural department for Webb & Knapp.”<sup>3</sup> In his characteristic practical mindset, Pei agreed to work for the development firm because he knew his designs would be constructed. He stayed at Webb & Knapp for seventeen years and it was during this time that he developed his defining context-based approach to architectural design. Pei explained, “The contextualism in the design of buildings was never more powerfully gotten across to me than in

association with developers like Zeckendorf. The noted architects at the time usually didn't involve themselves in this type of work."<sup>4</sup> Pei's ability to think like a developer and consider such aspects as the surrounding properties and nearby transportation systems informs his work, contributing greatly to its success and therefore, his reputation. While working for Zeckenforf he designed such significant buildings as Kips Bay Plaza in New York,<sup>5</sup> the Mile High Center in Denver, the Place Ville Marie in Montreal, and Society Hill in Philadelphia.<sup>6</sup> His work on these projects, which were completed in collaboration with the seventy designers he managed, also prepared Pei to be a successful businessman. Zeckendorf commented on Pei's skills, calling him, "Probably the greatest site planner alive... a perfectionist, but practical, a pleasant guy to have around,"<sup>7</sup>

In 1955 Pei formed I. M. Pei & Associates,<sup>8</sup> officially splitting from Webb & Knapp in 1962 and taking the first step toward becoming the icon he is today.<sup>9</sup> While working for Webb & Knapp, "Pei pioneered apartment towers constructed of reinforced concrete,"<sup>10</sup> and his early work reflects this interest in concrete. Cultural critic Paula Deitz explains that these apartment towers he designed for the development firm "quickly became fashionable addresses,"<sup>11</sup> which began to build Pei's reputation. One of the first commissions for his new firm was the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado, completed in 1967. Pei applied his ideas about concrete to the design of the building, which, while recognized by architects, was relatively unknown by the public. However, it was a very significant project for the architect. In her interview with Pei, Andrea O. Dean described this significance, writing, "Boulder was for Pei an intensely personal expression, his first."<sup>12</sup> The building has been celebrated for its "sculptural quality,"<sup>13</sup> made possible by the use of concrete and serving as a testament to Pei's artistry.

Finally, in the mid-1960s and early 70s Pei began to receive an increased amount of media attention and public recognition, mostly due to the coverage of two specific commissions, the John F Kennedy Library and the John Hancock Tower, both in Boston. After President John F Kennedy's death in 1963, efforts to construct his memorial library were quickly put into action. The selection of the architect for the project was a high-profile event, especially because the Kennedy family, and more specifically Jacqueline Kennedy, had the final decision. On December 14, 1964, a widely publicized press conference was held to announce Pei as the choice for the building's architect, with such important public figures as Robert Kennedy in attendance.<sup>14</sup> This event made the public aware of Pei and brought him a notable increase in fame. Pei's selection and its positive impact on his career were directly related to his unique design approach. Mrs. Kennedy explained her reasoning for the choice of Pei, saying, "He didn't seem to have just one way to solve a problem. He seemed to approach each commission thinking only of it and then develop a way to make something beautiful."<sup>15</sup> Due to heated location disputes, though, construction of the library was delayed a number of times and was not completed until 1979.<sup>16</sup> For the most part, critics did not provide strong opinions about the building, simply accepting its completion. Biographer Carter Wisenman suggested that the lack of a true critical response was due to "the growing prominence of the architect," and that "there seemed to be a general feeling of sympathy for the pain that had been suffered in delivering the library and no wish to compound it with a lack of kindness."<sup>17</sup>

One of Pei's firm's most famous buildings, the John Hancock tower in Boston, was at the time of its construction also their most visible. It ensured that his name was recognized by the public, but brought such a significant amount of negative attention that his reputation and the future of his firm were in jeopardy. The John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company

commissioned I. M. Pei & Partners to design a tower for the company's headquarters next to Copley Square in the early 1960s. After the need for a redesign, Pei, busy with other projects, gave the Hancock Tower to his partner Henry Cobb. Problems plagued the construction of the tower, beginning with the pouring of the foundation. The highly discussed issue was with the mirror glass panels that were to wrap the entire building. After a windstorm in January of 1973, many panels cracked, some even falling to the ground.<sup>18</sup> About one-third of the panels were replaced with plywood, setting off a stream of jokes in the media, mocking what was anticipated to be a masterpiece.<sup>19</sup> Journalist Jack Kroll explained, "Within a few weeks the John Hancock was a national laughingstock, and Pei, as the frontline name, shared the blame," calling the tower "the great disaster of his career."<sup>20</sup> While the publicity was extremely negative, Pei, who by this time was known as a leading architect, was now famous.

It was Pei's design for the East Building of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., completed in 1978, that brought him widespread recognition and respect, placing him at the top of the field. Wiseman wrote,

"If the travails of the John Hancock Tower threatened the very foundations of I. M. Pei & Partners as an artistic business enterprise, the completion of the East Building of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., secured those foundations against virtually any further assault. Rarely in the twentieth century has so much attention been paid to a work of architecture, and rarely has it come from such a wide range of people."<sup>21</sup>

As Wiseman indicates, Pei's design for the museum was a testament to his artistic ability. It cemented his status as a master of geometry whose ability to manipulate form results in a sculptural beauty. Critic Cathleen McGuigan commented on this talent, writing, "What a client gets with a Pei building is a clear and often ingenious geometric scheme – and always those elegant refined details. Pei buildings look expensive, but never flashy; they exude taste."<sup>22</sup> Pei's taste is seen in all aspects of the East Building design and it was this taste that earned him the

high praise he received. Based on Pei's belief that "the public is the final judge of public architecture,"<sup>23</sup> the East Building was extremely successful. Wiseman explained, "The public embraced the building with a warmth unprecedented for a work of American Modernist architecture; in its first two months, the East Building received more than a million visitors."<sup>24</sup> The acclaim for the East Building brought Pei future commissions, notably his most famous work, the Louvre Pyramid and reorganization.

French President Francois Mitterrand personally chose Pei to design the reorganization of the Louvre Museum because he admired Pei's East Building of the National Gallery.<sup>25</sup> When Pei's design for the seventy-one-foot high glass pyramid that would stand in front of the historic palace was revealed to the public, the people of France were outraged. The French newspaper *Le Figaro* held a survey to tally the supporters and the objectors of Pei's plan, determining after three weeks, "Some 90% favor the renovation but oppose the pyramid."<sup>26</sup> However, Mitterrand did not change his mind and the Louvre Pyramid was built along with Pei's plan for reorganization, its construction completed in 1989.<sup>27</sup> By the time of its public opening, dissenting opinions about the pyramid had changed completely, with some of its greatest opponents praising the design. It quickly became a French icon and in 1993, the French Gaullist Minister of Culture Jacques Toubon called the renovation "a historic and cultural space without comparison in the world."<sup>28</sup> The Louvre was Pei's most high-profile commission and remains his most famous work. Soon after the public unveiling in 1989 Pei stated, "I hope to do many more things, but never again will I have another opportunity like the Louvre."<sup>29</sup>

Dubbing 1989 "the year of Pei," Wiseman indicated that after the completion of the Louvre Pei's iconic status was indisputable.<sup>30</sup> This status was built almost entirely on his consistently successful work, which is owed to "the two great Pei strengths – logical, seemingly

inevitable programmatic problem-solving and extraordinary finish,”<sup>31</sup> As a result, he, as Wiseman wrote, “has received virtually every professional tribute of any importance in his field.”<sup>32</sup> These awards include, the Arnold Brunner Award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1961, the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Medal for Architecture in 1976, the Gold Medal for Architecture from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1979, the Gold Medal of the American Institute of Architects also in 1979, La Grande Medaille d’Or from the French Academy of Architecture in 1981, the Pritzker Prize in 1983, the Medal of Liberty in 1986, the National Medal of Arts in 1988, the Japanese Praemium Imperiale in 1989, the Edward MacDowell Medal in 1998, and the Royal Gold Medal from the British Institute of Architects in 2010.<sup>33</sup>

Pei’s success as an architect was enabled by his skill as a businessman known for his charm and charisma.<sup>34</sup> As reported when he received the Pritzker Prize, he based “his reputation not on theory but on practice...awarded the Pritzker as much for sheer professionalism as for artistry.”<sup>35</sup> Pei’s humility informs both the art and business sides of his work. His strong relationships with clients were founded this humility. Wiseman explained, “Despite his star status, Pei is able to make a first-time visitor, a workman on a construction site, or even a stranger paying his respects from the next table at a restaurant, feel as if the architect is the one being honored the attention.”<sup>36</sup> Unlike Wright and Johnson, he was not outspoken and rarely shared his personal opinion. Pei’s wife explained, “I. M. feels that what you do should speak for you, not what you say about other architects.”<sup>37</sup> The same social concern is also clear in his architecture. Pei said, “I agree with Philip Johnson that architecture in its highest form is great art. It must also pass another test; namely, how well has it satisfied its social purpose?”<sup>38</sup> Pei was not interested in creating buildings that would satisfy his own ego, but those that would fulfill their

social purpose and be appropriate for their context. It is in this way that Pei is regarded as a unique icon.

I. M. Pei has a clear goal for his legacy, one that, it can be easily argued, has already been completed during his lifetime. During the height of his career, Pei expressed, at different times, that he wished to be both of his time and classic. He explained, “I believe in continuity and change. I believe architecture is an important art form mirroring life. As an architect I want to build beautiful buildings that are respectful of their environment and, at the same time, satisfy social concerns. I want to be remembered as an architect of my time.”<sup>39</sup> In response to the label “classic” he said, “That means enduring quality. It may not look fashionable at the moment. Ten years from now it may look better. Twenty years from now, it may even look right.”<sup>40</sup> Pei’s elegant buildings represent this exact goal fulfilled. They define the talented architect who has become an icon as a result of their timeless success.



## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Robert Ivy, "At the twilight of his Career, I.M. Pei shows few signs of slowing down," *Architectural Record* 192 no. 6 (2004): 204
- <sup>2</sup> Andrea O. Dean, "Conversations: I. M. Pei," *AIA Journal* 68 no. 7 (1979): 61
- <sup>3</sup> Dean, "Conversations: I. M. Pei," 63
- <sup>4</sup> Dean, "Conversations: I. M. Pei," 64
- <sup>5</sup> Ivy, "At the twilight of his Career, I.M. Pei shows few signs of slowing down," 212
- <sup>6</sup> Dean, "Conversations: I. M. Pei," 64
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Paula Deitz, "The form simply came naturally," *Architects' Journal* 4 no. 4 (2010): 11
- <sup>9</sup> Dean, "Conversations: I. M. Pei," 65
- <sup>10</sup> Paula Deitz, "IM Pei: a life in architecture," *Architects' Journal* 4 no. 4 (2010): 42
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Dean, "Conversations: I. M. Pei," 65
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Carter Wiseman, *I.M. Pei: a profile in American architecture* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, Inc., 2001), 99
- <sup>15</sup> Wiseman, *I.M. Pei: a profile in American architecture*, 98
- <sup>16</sup> Wiseman, *I.M. Pei: a profile in American architecture*, 117
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Wiseman, *I.M. Pei: a profile in American architecture*, 148-149
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Jack Kroll, "I. M. Pei's Beacon to Camelot," *Newsweek*, October 29, 1979, 112
- <sup>21</sup> Wiseman, *I.M. Pei: a profile in American architecture*, 155
- <sup>22</sup> Cathleen McGuigan, "The Perfectionist," *Newsweek*, September 24, 1989, 60-61
- <sup>23</sup> Kroll, "I. M. Pei's Beacon to Camelot," 112
- <sup>24</sup> Wiseman, *I.M. Pei: a profile in American architecture*, 155
- <sup>25</sup> Wolf Von Eckardt, "Pei's Pyramid Perplexes Paris," *Time*, February 27, 1984, 94
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Wiseman, *I.M. Pei: a profile in American architecture*, 258
- <sup>28</sup> Thomas Sancton, "Pei's Palace of Art," *Time*, November 29, 1993, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,979695,00.html>
- <sup>29</sup> Wiseman, *I.M. Pei: a profile in American architecture*, 261
- <sup>30</sup> Wiseman, *I.M. Pei: a profile in American architecture*, 267
- <sup>31</sup> Martin Filler, "Star Quality," *Architectural Record* 178 (1990): 82
- <sup>32</sup> Wiseman, *I.M. Pei: a profile in American architecture*, 12
- <sup>33</sup> Deitz, "IM Pei: a life in architecture," 41, and Wiseman, *I.M. Pei: a profile in American architecture*, 12
- <sup>34</sup> McGuigan, "The Perfectionist," 62
- <sup>35</sup> "Pei's Pritzker: does a pattern emerge?," *Progressive Architecture* 64 (1983): 22
- <sup>36</sup> Wiseman, *I.M. Pei: a profile in American architecture*, 23
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Dean, "Conversations: I. M. Pei," 67
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>40</sup> McGuigan, “The Perfectionist,” 62

Frank Gehry



*Figure 7: Frank Gehry*

The current moment in architectural history belongs to today's leading architect Frank Gehry. His position in the field has surpassed that of the other prominent architects of the day and he has become one of the greatest icons in the history of architecture. Gehry is the face of the "starchitect," a term coined to define the current generation of leading architects who are both celebrities within the profession and progressive artists, highly respected for their significant works and possessing a certain amount of fame among the general public. However, as "the world's most famous living architect," Gehry strongly opposes the term, insisting, "I am not a 'starchitect', I am an ar-chitect."<sup>1</sup> His work demonstrates the importance he places on the role of the architect, one that he approaches from a very artistic perspective. For this reason, Gehry is frequently referred to as an artist and his work is often called art. He is known for his style of warped architecture, which produces abstracted and manipulated volumes combined in seemingly impossible, often fluid, and unexpected configurations. Gehry's unique designs have earned him his iconic status, but recognition was not immediate. His design for the 1978 renovation of his own house in Santa Monica finally established the fifty-year-old as a force for change in architecture, putting him "on the map of cutting-edge architects."<sup>2</sup> Since then his work on some of the most famous buildings of the past twenty years, including the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, has caused Gehry to become one of the strongest influences in architecture. As "the most talked-about architect since Frank Lloyd Wright,"<sup>3</sup> Gehry is the only architect whose iconic status approaches that of the discipline's deity.

His first buildings were overwhelmingly conventional compared to the work for which he is now famous. Architecture critic Richard Lacayo explained that Gehry's early work "largely satisfied modernist expectations that any structure should be a spare, unified form clearly

expressing its underlying function.”<sup>4</sup> It does not come as a surprise that the architect was unsatisfied with designing such buildings. Lacayo wrote, “Gehry was powerfully interested in painting and sculpture and the rising West Coast art scene... What he really wanted was the freedom they had to play with surrealism, assemblage and pop imagery.”<sup>5</sup> Gehry’s solution was an abandonment of easily acceptable building, marked by his uninhibited creative expression in the renovation of his house in 1978. The originality of Gehry’s design immediately brought him attention from the architectural field and the media. Lacayo wrote, “It instantly became one of those places that some say is an icon and others an eyesore. But its picture appeared everywhere.”<sup>6</sup> Gehry became known for his use of unusual materials, such as plywood and chain link.<sup>7</sup> However, receiving commissions was challenging at first, as Gehry said, “We went through hell.”<sup>8</sup>

Gehry’s prestige began to rise with the completion of many private residences and an increased number of large projects, such as the California Aerospace Museum and Theater completed in 1984 and Prague’s Nationale-Nederlanden Building, or Dancing Building, of 1996.<sup>9</sup> This work caused him to be labeled the “most original of American architects.”<sup>10</sup> It was Gehry’s design for the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, completed in 1997, that earned him international fame and began building his iconic status. Lacayo wrote, “Bilbao Guggenheim opened, abruptly making Gehry the most celebrated architect in the world.”<sup>11</sup> Critics flooded Gehry with praise. The consensus was, in the words of Robert Hughes, “As a work of art in its own right, the museum is far more interesting than many of its contents”<sup>12</sup> Philip Johnson, himself an icon, called Gehry’s Guggenheim, “The most important building of our time.”<sup>13</sup> The museum’s impact was immense, as Lacayo commented, “It brings on a question that the world has not enjoyed asking itself since the first moon landings: If this is possible, what isn’t?”<sup>14</sup>

Cities around the world were inspired to commission museums that would make as bold a statement as Gehry's Guggenheim. In addition, the architect's work was requested worldwide. His design for the Walt Disney Concert Hall in his home city of Los Angeles confirmed his status as an icon. The building was completed in 2003 and, like the Guggenheim, its design inspired an extremely positive critical reaction. Lacayo wrote, "Its silvery cascades are one of the most beautiful sights anywhere in the U.S. If you have seen the Grand Canyon, another sun-drenched, curvy thing of hypnotic power, you have some idea of what the Disney Hall is like."<sup>15</sup> Together, "the Guggenheim Bilbao and Disney Concert Hall made Frank Gehry the world's most famous living architect."<sup>16</sup> Some of the major projects Gehry has completed since the construction of the Disney Concert Hall include the Ray and Maria Sata Center at MIT, finished in 2004; the Marqués de Riscal Vineyard Hotel in Elciego, Spain of 2006; and his most recent building, his first tower, New York by Gehry at Eight Spruce Street in New York City, completed in 2011.<sup>17</sup>

The majority of praise for Gehry focuses on the artistry of his designs, often identifying him as both architect and artist. At first though, this dual identity was not entirely viewed a positive attribute. Architecture critic Herbert Muschamp explained, "For years, those who had trouble appreciating Gehry's work described him as more of an artist than an architect."<sup>18</sup> Soon though, those within the architecture field acknowledged that Gehry's uniqueness was founded in his artistic approach. Lacayo wrote, "Gehry works like a sculptor, drawing and building three-dimensional models."<sup>19</sup> His masterpieces of architecture are not known simply as buildings but as works of art. At the same time, he established his reputation as the world's leading architect with a certain amount of awareness of the constraints of the construction process. Journalist Holly Williams reported, "The emphasis he places on sticking to a budget shows that he is aware

of the biggest gripes faced by his profession – that its members get carried away, with little consideration for their customers’ bank balances.” While this is true, there have been a number of complaints launched against Gehry for structural problems and high costs.

The most common problem in Gehry’s buildings is leaking and the most famous case in which this issue has caused considerable controversy is the Stata Center at MIT. In 2007, the university sued Gehry for “design and construction failures,” which included leaking, cracking, and “structural deficiency”<sup>20</sup> However, many of the faculty working in the building supported Gehry due to their satisfaction with the architect’s success in designing “a building that fostered communication.”<sup>21</sup> Gehry, more of an artist than a businessman, commented, “I think the issues are fairly minor...MIT is after our insurance.”<sup>22</sup> Critics have also focused on his apparent indulgence in the creation of art for the sake of beauty, asking, “Shouldn’t he make some more socially relevant buildings? Aren’t his designs too extravagant?”<sup>23</sup> Gehry’s simply responded, “We are architects... We serve customers... I can’t just decide myself what’s being built.”<sup>24</sup>

This response is one of Gehry’s many characteristics that are reminiscent of the great Frank Lloyd Wright. Architectural scholar Esther da Costa Meyer argued, “It would be difficult to imagine an architect more different from Wright than Frank Gehry. Wright always focused on the building. Gehry, of a much younger generation, never loses sight of the architect, with all his emotional baggage, his strengths and weaknesses.”<sup>25</sup> Viewed as two icons of architecture, though, Gehry and Wright are very similar. Firstly, like Wright, Gehry is interested in the artistry of architecture, focused on creating buildings that fulfill his vision as an artist. Both are unique individuals who introduced changes in architecture with their original work, defining a particular moment in the history of the discipline. While not as outspoken as Wright, Gehry directly expresses his opinion, which is often critical. Williams explained, “His candor is refreshing,

however, in the way it allows him to criticize modish or politically correct assumptions.”<sup>26</sup> For example, Gehry commented on one of today’s leading architects Norman Foster saying, “Is Norman Foster radical? I don’t think so. What does it mean to be radical? Some people have the ability to experiment and some don’t. Anyway, most of the world doesn’t want experimentation.”<sup>27</sup> Wright was a consistent source of such perspective. Also like Wright, Gehry has completed some of his most significant work in his seventies.

Although as of now Gehry’s influence is not as extensive as Wright’s he has made a considerable impact on the field. Before he was a “starchitect,” Gehry’s work began influencing a younger generation of architects. Critic Cathleen McGuigan reported in 1991, “His more distinguished young colleagues say his artistic independence has been an inspiration, not his ‘look.’ ‘Gehry showed that you can break all the rules,’ says architect Frank Isreal.”<sup>28</sup> Gehry’s influence affected the entire architecture field around the world when his Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao was completed. Lacayo explained, “Frank Gehry in 1997 undid everyone’s idea of what a building looks like. Ever since, his greatest influence has been this: he has profoundly reordered the idea of constructed space.”<sup>29</sup> Not only did Gehry inspire architects to reconsider their approach to the profession with his Guggenheim design, he also helped to increase the field’s prestige. Leading architect Richard Meier “is happy about the way Bilbao has made architecture ‘part of public discussion again. All of a sudden people will say, ‘This is architecture. It is not just building.’”<sup>30</sup>

In addition to his work and influence, Gehry’s fame has built up his iconic status. This celebrity status is never detached from his identity as an architect, though. Lacayo wrote, “Gehry has managed to be both intellectually respectable and popular, not just populist.”<sup>31</sup> As a result, he has maintained the level of respect he receives from colleagues and others within the architecture



field while involving himself with a number of aspects of popular culture. For example, in his light-hearted manner, he “did the voice-over for his appearance in *The Simpsons*, parodying himself.”<sup>32</sup> The fact that he was featured in an episode of this extremely popular television show demonstrates the extent to which Gehry has become a prominent figure in American culture. He has also reached a wider audience by designing “a vodka bottle for Wyborowa and wrist watches for Fossil,” and most recently “jewelry for Tiffany’s”<sup>33</sup>

Frank Gehry has reached, as Williams calls it, a “stratospheric position in the world of architecture.”<sup>34</sup> As a result of his unique artistry and a number of extremely successful designs, Gehry has become an icon who represents the current moment in architecture. Architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussoff wrote that Gehry’s most recent project, *New York by Gehry* at Eight Spruce Street, “seems to crystalize a particular moment in cultural history, in this case the turning point from the modern to the digital age.”<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, Lacayo described Gehry’s architecture as a commentary on society, writing, “Gehry’s formulations speak to the ways in which people and ideas circulate today.”<sup>36</sup> Not only the architect of his time, Gehry will have continued influence on the architecture of the future. Lacayo suggested that Gehry will be remembered as the best architect in history to create fluid sculptural forms, writing, “The 20<sup>th</sup> century...has had its share of architects who pursued a sculptural, curvilinear style: Gaudi, Wright, the late-period Le Corbusier and Alvar Aalto. They left admirers yet still got pushed to the sidelines. But the Bilbao Guggenheim has raised the prospect that Gehry’s work is not merely interesting; it’s the wave of the future.”<sup>37</sup> He proposed the possibility of a “School of Gehry,” indicating that the architect’s profound impact on architecture has yet to be fully realized. Gehry became an icon due to the success and artistry of his unique designs. As he continues to become increasingly famous and influential, he has the potential to be as highly regarded as architecture deity Frank Lloyd Wright.

## Notes

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- <sup>2</sup> Richard Lacayo, "Architecture: The Frank Gehry Experience," *Time*, June 26, 2000, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,997295,00.html>
- <sup>3</sup> Williams, "Frank Gehry: 'Don't call me a starchitect'"
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- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Richard Lacayo, "Architecture: The Art of the Warp," *Time*, October 27, 2003, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1005997,00.html>
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- <sup>9</sup> Francesco Dal Co and Kurt W. Forster, *Frank O. Gehry: The Complete Works* (New York: The Monacelli Press, Inc.: 1998)
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- <sup>19</sup> Lacayo, "Architecture: The Frank Gehry Experience"
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- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Williams, "Frank Gehry: 'Don't call me a starchitect'"
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- <sup>25</sup> Esther da Costa Meyer, *Frank Gehry On Line* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Art Museum, 2008): 18
- <sup>26</sup> Williams, "Frank Gehry: 'Don't call me a starchitect'"
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<sup>30</sup> Lacayo, "Architecture: The Frank Gehry Experience"

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Williams, "Frank Gehry: 'Don't call me a starchitect'"

<sup>33</sup> "Gehry Special"

<sup>34</sup> Williams, "Frank Gehry: 'Don't call me a starchitect'"

<sup>35</sup> Ouroussoff, "Downtown Skyscraper for the Digital Age"

<sup>36</sup> Lacayo, "Architecture: The Frank Gehry Experience"

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Alexander McQueen



*Figure 8: Alexander McQueen*

Lee Alexander McQueen, best known as Alexander McQueen, was one of the leading and most promising fashion designers in the industry when he committed suicide in 2010, ending his life at the height of his career. Referred to as the “bad boy”<sup>1</sup> of fashion and the industry’s “enfant terrible,”<sup>2</sup> McQueen’s unexpected avant-garde designs and shocking runway shows frequently created controversy. His short career began in 1994 with his first professional line and spanned only seventeen years. However, McQueen was not lacking in experience and the amount of work he produced was extensive. He designed a women’s line for his label Alexander McQueen throughout his career and launched a menswear line in 2005 as well as a sportswear label called McQ in 2006.<sup>3</sup> In addition, he served as the designer for Givenchy from 1997 to 2001. His success was immediate, beginning with his graduate collection at Central Saint Martin’s College in 1992. Former Fashion Editor of *Vogue* and style icon Isabella Blow purchased the entire collection, enabling the launch of his line. While McQueen did not always receive positive reviews, attention from both the media and the fashion world was constant. His controversial collections were consistently well executed, exhibiting McQueen’s expertise in tailoring and high quality of craftsmanship.<sup>4</sup> In addition, his designs challenged the boundaries of fashion as an art form. His biographer Kristin Knox called him, “An artist in every sense of the word.”<sup>5</sup> It was this artistry that earned McQueen recognition and respect from the fashion industry. Often called an artist, the word “genius” was also used to describe McQueen. Knox explained, “His was the kind of genius that only comes around once in a generation.” For this reason, his death devastated those within the world of fashion. McQueen had only recently become an established icon and was just beginning to realize his potential.

The success of McQueen’s graduation collection brought him recognition within London’s fashion scene, but did not give rise to his fame. It was one of his earliest collections

that made his name known. In 1995, McQueen presented a collection titled “Highland Rape,” in which “he referenced the ravaging of Scotland by England by showing brutalized women.”<sup>6</sup> This collection is considered to be his most controversial line due to his dramatization of the disturbing historical event. McQueen’s fame grew when he set off the trend for low-rise jeans in 1996 with his “bumster,” aptly named for its skin-baring quality.<sup>7</sup> The bumster remained one of his most famous designs throughout his career. While McQueen had gained a certain amount of fame within the fashion industry, his prestige had not yet risen. With his appointment as Givenchy’s chief designer, though, McQueen was placed among the top designers in the field.

Fashion journalist Dorie Denbigh reported the selection of McQueen by Givenchy, writing, “McQueen, an East Ender previously unknown outside the trendier London precincts, was named to succeed his countryman at Givenchy. The fashion world went into shock.”<sup>8</sup> Denbigh’s suggestion that McQueen was not known at the time of Givenchy’s selection is not supported by the reactions to his provocative collections, but she was correct in her argument that McQueen was a completely unexpected choice. Regardless of the fame brought on by his position at Givenchy, McQueen’s work was not well received by critics. *Time* Editor-at-Large Belinda Luscombe reported, “His five-year stint at Givenchy was a disaster from the moment he set foot in the atelier.”<sup>9</sup> McQueen acknowledged his lack of success at the French fashion house, saying, “Givenchy took it out of me...I’ve got to work harder, I know.”<sup>10</sup>

Unlike his collections for Givenchy, McQueen’s clothing for his own line was praised for its inventiveness. As a result, toward the end of his time at Givenchy, when some critics began to appreciate his designs for the atelier as well, he started to become an icon. In an article written in 2000, one year before his position at Givenchy ended, Fashion editor for *The Independent* Susannah Frankel commented, “Still aged only 30, McQueen’s extraordinary imagination and

power to provoke at the drop of a hat has meant that he has become the best-known, most talked about fashion designer in the world.”<sup>11</sup> For the remaining ten years of his career, McQueen maintained this position, due to the significance of a number of his collections, especially the later lines, including Fall/Winter 2008 with its Indian inspiration, Fall/Winter 2009 in which he mocked established predecessors, and Spring/Summer 2010 in which he introduced the famous Armadillo shoes. His shows were as influential as his clothing and were instrumental in defining his iconic status. Known for their theatrics and controversial elements, these performances were extremely important to McQueen. One of the designer’s stipulations when his company was bought by Gucci Group in 2000 was that “Gucci executives never interfered,” as McQueen explained, “that’s all I ever asked.”<sup>12</sup> Some of his most dramatic stunts included a ring of fire for Fall/Winter 1998 and a holograph of model Kate Moss for Fall/Winter 2006. Luscombe wrote, “He did all this while sending down one jaw-droppingly beautiful garment after another.”<sup>13</sup> Together, the clothing and the presentation became an art form.

McQueen’s garments were considered to be beautiful because of his abilities as a tailor and his talent as an artist. Fashion designer Paul Smith commented on McQueen’s craftsmanship, saying, “There are very few real designers who have a craft, which is to say a sense of cut, proportion and tailoring...Alexander has it.”<sup>14</sup> In addition to maintaining this level of quality in his clothing, McQueen refused to sacrifice his artistic vision. He explained, “I’m a clever designer. I can do what the client wants. But I’m prepared to forget about money if it affects my creativity because, remember, I started off with nothing. I started off on the dole. And I can do it again.”<sup>15</sup> When he combined this artistry with his tailoring skill, his manipulations of fabric were at times architectural, “structuring garments to change the shape of the body.”<sup>16</sup> In this way, he, like Gehry, blurred the lines between his professional practice and art. McQueen’s interest was

clearly in the art of fashion, rather than the business, in which he barely participated. He was not interested in enabling facilitating the self-expression of his wearer, but enabling his own.

McQueen used his garments “to compel the wearer or beholder to surrender to the fantastical and sinister world of which McQueen was the sole artificer.”<sup>17</sup> Luscombe commented on the designer’s personal investment in his work, writing, “McQueen’s creativity has always reeked not of the innocence of youth or joyful fripperies, but of brutal experience.”<sup>18</sup>

Due to his notorious attitude and controversial work, McQueen quickly developed a bad boy image, which became an essential element of his iconic status. Frankel described him as, “The so-called ‘bad boy of British fashion,’ a designer who has made something of a career out of shocking not only the press and public but also the supposedly shock-proof fashion industry he works within.”<sup>19</sup> McQueen’s independent spirit caused him to speak out against the fashion industry. Most notably, in his Fall/Winter 2009 collection, McQueen challenged the constant reinvention of classic works of fashion by doing so in a dramatic and sarcastic manner. Fashion critic Eric Wilson wrote, “The most ambitious we have seen this season, was as much a slap in the face to his industry, then, as it was a brave statement about the absurdity of the race to build empires in fashion.”<sup>20</sup> Part of McQueen’s image as an icon was this boldness in the expression of his opinions. Luscombe explained, “He seemed to enjoy scandalizing journalists – telling them he didn’t care for their publication, showing them artwork or something repellent, talking like a longshoreman...badmouthing his bosses. The loutishness make his talent seem purer and rawer and more exciting.”<sup>21</sup>

As a truly unique individual whose designs reflected this quality, McQueen received a significant amount of negative criticism and press. The largest complaint against him was that he was misogynistic, based on his representation of abused and objectified women in such shows as



“Highland Rape.” McQueen was concerned by this reaction. He commented, “Everything I’ve done... was for the purpose of making women look stronger, not naïve. And so, when everyone started saying I was a misogynist, that really freaked me out. They didn’t know me.”<sup>22</sup> As the bad boy of fashion, though, McQueen was easily misunderstood. His other major criticism was that his clothing was “unwearable and inaccessible beyond the voyeuristic spectacles of his lavish, unorthodox runaway shows.”<sup>23</sup> These views were well supported by accounts from models and sales of McQueen’s women’s line especially. For example, the famous Armadillo show from his final runway show, Spring/Summer 2010, was a twelve-inch stiletto known for the difficulties it caused with walking. Knox reported, “Several models refused to step out onto the runway in them, for fear of breaking a leg.”<sup>24</sup> McQueen’s outlandish designs were not well suited to daily wear, but they proved that fashion could be as interested in the creation of art as in the production of clothing. His women’s line was popular among celebrities, though, including Sarah Jessica Parker, Nicole Kidman, and Penelope Cruz. Also, performers, such as Lady Gaga, Rihanna, and Björk, favored his dramatic pieces.<sup>25</sup> The support of such famous public figures caused McQueen to reach a wider audience and established his iconic status among the general public.

Beginning his career and earning recognition at a young age, McQueen was often seen as the face of a younger generation in fashion. His avant-garde designs and rebellious personality set him apart from the older establishment and perpetuated his image as the leader of a new crop of designers, representing a young audience. Sarah Jessica Parker wrote, “His was an important voice, and he carried the torch for a new generation.”<sup>26</sup> In addition to his work and position within the industry, McQueen’s innovative ideas about the future of fashion supported this image. His Spring/Summer 2010 show was streamed live on the Internet, making him “the first major

designer to do a live webcast of his show.”<sup>27</sup> This increased visibility worked toward reducing the inaccessibility of his designs. Today, only two years later, a majority of the major designers have adopted live streaming of their runway shows. In order to improve sales, McQueen “eventually acceded to the ways of the market,”<sup>28</sup> launching perfume and underwear lines. He also formed a partnership with the discount retailer Target, making his work available to his younger audience at a lower price point. McQueen’s interest in the future of the industry continues to have an impact today. His designs are still ahead of fashion today, perhaps because, as McQueen explained, “People don’t want to see clothes. They want to see something that fuels the imagination.”<sup>29</sup>

McQueen’s death ended the possibility of the fulfillment of his visions for fashion’s future. The news of his suicide on February 11, 2010<sup>30</sup> sent shock waves throughout the industry and was immediately published by most major news sources. People were surprised not only by the forty-year-old designer’s early death, but also by the way in which he died. Luscombe reported, “McQueen died the same way he did everything else: unexpectedly, controversially, and as unbelievably as possible.”<sup>31</sup> Many people who had never heard of McQueen before suddenly recognized his name. The amount of attention his death received gave a sense of his importance and secured his status as an icon. McQueen presented his most successful collection only four months before killing himself, leaving the fashion world to imagine the extent of his creative capabilities. Based on his reception while alive, McQueen most likely would have become one of the most prominent designers of the early twenty-first century.

Regardless of mixed reactions, McQueen’s career was defined by critical acclaim in recognition of his genius and talent. He was awarded British Designer of the Year in 1996, 1997, 2001, and 2003; International Designer of the Year by the Council of Fashion Designers of

America in 2003; Most Excellent Commander of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II in 2003; and GQ Menswear Designer of the Year in 2007.<sup>32</sup> In addition to the designer, many of his designs and shows have become iconic. Fashion critic Cathy Horyn compared McQueen to his icon Rei Kawakubo of Comme de Garçons, writing, “His clothes, like hers, have the power to open us up. In their hands, fashion is not meaningless.”<sup>33</sup> McQueen gave fashion meaning with the art he created and undoubtedly would have continued to do so. He established a strong image, with both his work and his personality, for which he is remembered as an icon today. Knox wrote, “His legacy, a design aesthetic so fully submerged in his vision, has eclipsed the designer’s own imagination and become a kind of fashion religion itself.”<sup>34</sup> This aesthetic has been extremely influential. Frankel explained, “It is with the Alexander McQueen label that he has really made his mark, changing the face of fashion.”<sup>35</sup> Commenting on McQueen’s death, Editor-in-Chief of *Vogue* Anna Wintour, who currently reigns over the fashion industry, said, “In such a short career, Alexander McQueen’s influence was astonishing – from street style, to music culture and the world’s museums. His passing marks an insurmountable loss.”<sup>36</sup> It was this loss that has secured Alexander McQueen’s permanent place in fashion history as an irreplaceable icon.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Susannah Frankel, "Alexander McQueen," *The Independent fashion magazine* (2000) in *Visionaries: Interviews with Fashion Designers*, ed. Susannah Frankel (London: V&A Publications, 2001), 16
- <sup>2</sup> Kristin Knox, *Alexander McQueen: Genius of a Generation* (London: A & C Black Publishers Limited, 2010): 7
- <sup>3</sup> "Alexander McQueen," *New York Magazine*,  
<http://nymag.com/fashion/fashionshows/designers/bios/alexandermcqueen/>
- <sup>4</sup> Knox, *Alexander McQueen: Genius of a Generation*, 7
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> Eric Wilson, "McQueen Leaves Fashion in Ruins," *New York Times*, March 12, 2009,  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/12/fashion/12MCQUEEN.html?sq=mcqueen%20leaves%20fashion%20in%20ruins&st=cse&adxnnl=1&scp=1&adxnnlx=1302887651-wFf8PHxns5+M75Lp1mFMtg>
- <sup>7</sup> Cathy Horyn, "General Lee," *New York Times*, September 11, 2009,  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/t-magazine/mens-fashion/13mcqueen.html?\\_r=1&adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1302885128-b83P4K5GfOCruZ/CohCHGw](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/13/t-magazine/mens-fashion/13mcqueen.html?_r=1&adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1302885128-b83P4K5GfOCruZ/CohCHGw)
- <sup>8</sup> Dorie Denbigh, "Fashion: On the Cutting Edge," *Time*, November 11, 1996,  
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,985521,00.html>
- <sup>9</sup> Belinda Luscombe, "Alexander McQueen: Fashion Mourns an Icon," *Time*, February 11, 2010,  
<http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1963917,00.html>
- <sup>10</sup> Cathy Horyn, "McQueen Nods to a Prince, But Genuflects Toward Milan," *New York Times*, February 27, 2001, B9
- <sup>11</sup> Frankel, "Alexander McQueen," 16
- <sup>12</sup> Horyn, "General Lee"
- <sup>13</sup> Luscombe, "Alexander McQueen: Fashion Mourns an Icon"
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> Frankel, "Alexander McQueen," 22
- <sup>16</sup> Luscombe, "Alexander McQueen: Fashion Mourns an Icon"
- <sup>17</sup> Knox, *Alexander McQueen: Genius of a Generation*, 7
- <sup>18</sup> Belinda Luscombe, et. al. "The Shape of Things to Come," *Time*, February 5, 2003,  
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1004177,00.html>
- <sup>19</sup> Frankel, "Alexander McQueen," 16
- <sup>20</sup> Wilson, "McQueen Leaves Fashion in Ruins"
- <sup>21</sup> Luscombe, "Alexander McQueen: Fashion Mourns an Icon"
- <sup>22</sup> Frankel, "Alexander McQueen," 20
- <sup>23</sup> Knox, *Alexander McQueen: Genius of a Generation*, 7
- <sup>24</sup> Knox, *Alexander McQueen: Genius of a Generation*, 121
- <sup>25</sup> Knox, *Alexander McQueen: Genius of a Generation*, cover sleeve
- <sup>26</sup> Sarah Jessica Parker, "Alexander McQueen," *Time*, March 1, 2010,  
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1966477,00.html>
- <sup>27</sup> Luscombe, "Alexander McQueen: Fashion Mourns an Icon"
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

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- <sup>29</sup> Wilson, “McQueen Leaves Fashion in Ruins”
- <sup>30</sup> Luscombe, “Alexander McQueen: Fashion Mourns an Icon”
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> “About Alexander McQueen,” Alexander McQueen,  
<http://www.alexandermcqueen.com/int/en/servicepages/aboutmcqueen.aspx>
- <sup>33</sup> Horyn, “General Lee”
- <sup>34</sup> Knox, *Alexander McQueen: Genius of a Generation*, 123
- <sup>35</sup> Frankel, “Alexander McQueen,” 22
- <sup>36</sup> Knox, *Alexander McQueen: Genius of a Generation*, 18

## Conclusion

Each of the eight individuals examined presents a unique story about the rise of their status that eventually led to their recognition as icons of architecture and fashion, demonstrating that any variety of factors and events can affect the creation of an icon. While each of the eight represents a different image of iconicity, there are a number of characteristics that connect these figures across professions and time periods. As a result, they help to indicate the qualities that are given the greatest significance in the two fields. Due to their validation by the general public, the icons also shed light on the relationship between society, architecture, and fashion, and the aspects of the two fields that are most valued by those who do not work within them. In this way, the study of icons explores the roles of architects and fashion designers, as well as architecture and fashion in general, within society and in relation to each other, as the disciplines continue to develop and grow closer together.

The three major factors that contribute to the construction of an architect's or fashion designer's iconic status are the work they produce, their unparalleled abilities as a creative professional and artist, and their personality. All of the eight individuals examined excelled as designers, easily producing clothing and buildings containing a high level of aesthetic quality. The way in which these icons expressed their creative abilities ranged from Coco Chanel's revolutionary adaptation and reinvention of menswear for women to Alexander McQueen's sculpting of body-altering avant-garde garments. In addition, all of the eight icons experienced a significant amount of success and critical acclaim for their work at some point during their careers, or, in many cases, throughout their careers. Their work was viewed as a testament to their talents, which set them apart from their colleagues. When the reputation and respect earned

from such creative success is combined with a strong personality, the media immediately focuses more attention on the individual. This was the case for Frank Lloyd Wright, who, at the beginning of his career, was mentioned in the press more often for personal matters than for his work. Not all of the icons discussed had such large and unique personalities, but at the same time, not all of the eight are considered to be the most talented creators from their fields. For example, while Philip Johnson was not acknowledged as possessing artistic talent similar to that of Frank Gehry, he was a public figure whose celebrity status was defined by his association with New York's social scene.

As icons, each of the individuals is remembered for specific qualities that helped give rise to their statuses, which serve as abstracted and idealized versions of their unique identities. Many of these qualities are shared by the eight icons examined and the most common is that of the individualist. Frank Lloyd Wright, Coco Chanel, Philip Johnson, Frank Gehry, and Alexander McQueen had distinct personalities with specific focuses on their creative expression. They did not compromise their personal goals in order to ensure the creation of their designs. With the exception of Philip Johnson, all of these individualists were also innovators, along with Christian Dior and Yves Saint Laurent. Their influential work changed the courses of architecture and fashion, guaranteeing their statuses as icons. Neither an individualist nor an innovator, I. M. Pei is one of the most unique icons discussed. He earned this status by creating well-designed, high quality, and timeless work with a focus on pleasing the client and solving the problems presented by a project. In this way, he operated a very successful business, demonstrating his ability to address the artistic and practical demands of his profession. Of the eight, Pei is the only icon who completely handled the art and product duality inherent in the fields of architecture and fashion.

The success of the businesses established by the other icons was, for the most part, due to the involvement of a partner.

The clear disparity between icons who represent the artistic side of architecture and fashion and those who represent the business side of the two fields indicates that there is a much greater value placed on creative expression. In addition, with three of the icons, including Frank Lloyd Wright, Coco Chanel, and Philip Johnson, recognized as outspoken critics and three, including Philip Johnson, Frank Gehry, and Alexander McQueen, known for their ability to create controversy, there is little interest in those who possess the characteristics necessary to successfully run a business. Pei's mastery in geometric design and consistency in producing elegant architecture earned him the iconic status he holds today. Unlike a number of the individualist or innovative icons, his recognition was slowly built over time. For example, Christian Dior immediately became an icon with the introduction of his first line in 1947, as did Frank Gehry when he completed the deconstructionist renovation of his house in 1978.

Iconic status, while often secured by the critical acclaim or popularity of a certain work or a strong impact on the field, is usually confirmed by the length of an icon's career. Of the eight icons, six had extremely long careers with most lasting close to or beyond fifty years. The two icons whose careers were not as long are Christian Dior and Alexander McQueen. Both fashion designers' lives were cut short at the height of their careers by their tragic and unexpected deaths. Christian Dior's position in fashion history had already been firmly established, but it was Alexander McQueen's suicide that guaranteed his iconic status. Typically, the general public is slower to acknowledge iconic architects and fashion designers. For this reason, individuals with longer careers are more likely to be recognized by a wider audience outside of their field and become icons.



In architecture and fashion, as in any professional field, individuals stand out as being more successful or having more talent than others. It is the basic function of providing shelter that ties architecture and fashion into daily life and causes a wider audience to be interested in their progression. As a result, these prominent architects and fashion designers are enabled to become icons. This dependence on those outside of the fields demonstrates the importance of the production of products by the two creative disciplines. In this way, architecture and fashion are constantly connected to societal and cultural conditions and acknowledging this connection, architects and fashion designers often comment on them. Due to this connection, these creative professionals are some of the most famous artists. The fact that those who practice design can reach such an iconic status within popular culture is unique to these two fields. As important as the product, the garment or building, is in forming this connection, these icons are recognized and celebrated for their artistry.

The icon performs a beneficial service for both their field and society, while simultaneously being supported by the two. Within their field, they serve as an example of excellence and their status is a goal for which younger generations strive. At the same time, their fame among the general public inspires interest in their field. They heighten basic clothing and buildings to art forms and in doing so, act as tastemakers for society in general. These icons provide an aesthetic that is disseminated throughout the visual elements of daily life. The construction of such icons by both fashion and architecture highlights the parallels and intersections between the two fields. The architects and fashion designers who reach this status hold a unique position in society that cannot be found in any other profession.

## Image List

Figure 1: Frank Lloyd Wright,  
<http://www.bolender.com/Frank%20Lloyd%20Wright/Frank%20Lloyd%20Wright.htm>

Figure 2: Coco Chanel, <http://arockridgelifewordpress.com/2009/05/20/some-flowers-by-bornay-for-coco-chanel/>

Figure 3: Christian Dior, [http://www.egodesign.ca/en/article.php?article\\_id=245](http://www.egodesign.ca/en/article.php?article_id=245)

Figure 4: Philip Johnson, <http://artisthegiftofmetamorphosis.blogspot.com/2010/10/drawing-convention-1.html>

Figure 5: Yves Saint Laurent, <http://www.fashion-forum.org/fashion-designers/yves-saint-laurent.html>

Figure 6: I. M. Pei, [http://www.interiordesign.net/article/481888-I\\_M\\_Pei\\_Receives\\_Royal\\_Gold\\_Medal\\_From\\_RIBA.php](http://www.interiordesign.net/article/481888-I_M_Pei_Receives_Royal_Gold_Medal_From_RIBA.php)

Figure 7: Frank Gehry, <http://www.trenthead.com/2007/01/frank-gehry/>

Figure 8: Alexander McQueen, <http://www.nitrolicious.com/blog/2009/01/16/alexander-mcqueen-x-puma-apparel-accessories-collection/>

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