



The End of Fashion: How Marketing Changed the Clothing Business Forever

By Teri Agins

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The time when "fashion" was defined by French designers whose clothes could be afforded only by elite has ended. Now designers take their cues from mainstream consumers and creativity is channeled more into mass-marketing clothes than into designing them. Indeed, one need look no further than the Gap to see proof of this. In *The End of Fashion*, *Wall Street Journal*, reporter Teri Agins astutely explores this seminal change, laying bare all aspects of the fashion industry from manufacturing, retailing, and licensing to image making and financing. Here as well are fascinating insider vignettes that show Donna Karan fighting with financiers, the rivalry between Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger, and the commitment to haute couture that sent Isaac Mizrahi's business spiraling.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Dispensing with the idea that fashion designers are unpredictable geniuses sequestered in creative isolation from vulgar commerce, Agins, who covers the fashion industry for the Wall Street Journal, has taken a long, hard look at style in the '90s and come back with a compelling report on why big business has forever altered what we wear. In seven superbly researched essays, she explains that the designers are currently being challenged to sell essentially the same clothes to a public with increasingly homogenized tastes. "Today's 'branding' of fashion," she writes, "has taken on a critical role [when] just about every store in the mall is peddling the same style of clothes." Brands, in this context, are the designers themselves. A woman doesn't go shopping for a particular style of dress, but for a "Calvin" or a "Ralph." A lifestyle distillation that denotes professional and severe urban minimalism (Calvin Klein) or athletic, American conservatism (Ralph Lauren). The casualties of this trend are the craftsmanlike members of the Old School, as Agins ably demonstrates in essays on fading Parisian haute couture. Liveliest by far is Agins's chronicle of the rivalry between Lauren and the upstart Tommy Hilfiger, who sells clothes nearly identical to Lauren's, but with a hipper edge, captivating black city kids. The influence of Armani on Tinseltown and Donna Karan on Wall Street are also analyzed with verve and clear-sightedness. As glossy fashion magazines increasingly offer fantasies illustrated by advertisements far more often than they deliver journalism, Agins's penetrating dispatch from the rag trade is especially welcome. Photos. (Oct.)

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From Library Journal

Agins, a veteran fashion reporter for the Wall Street Journal, has written the first factual book on the fashion industry from a business/cultural/social journalist's view. She traces the beginning of couture from the early 20th century in France through all the stages to the present, when consumers set the fashion rules and designers must follow them. Major components of her story include retailers like Marshall Field, Federated Department Stores, Dillards, Nordstrom, and the Gap as well as designers Giorgio Armani, Bill Blass, Ralph Lauren, and Donna Karan. In the end, this story is about the triumph of marketing; Agins demonstrates how changes in our culture, e.g., more casual dress, have changed the fashion business. Filled with insider details and descriptions of the fickle nature of consumers, this book belongs in academic business and fashion collections. ASusan C. Awe, Univ. of New Mexico Lib., Albuquerque

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From [Booklist](#)

In one of the oddest industries ever to be chronicled, CEOs of IPOs clash with the wishes of their majority shareholders, and luxury conglomerates exist solely by the avarice and greed of fans of their labels. What else but the incestuous fashion world--and who better to chronicle its rise and fall and rise and fall than an independent, objective *Wall Street Journal* reporter? Agins tells the tales well and thus captures readers' attention, narrating the stories of the Ralph Lauren-Tommy Hilfiger rivalry, the power of celebrity dressing, and the four reasons for the decline of "true" fashion. (One reason is that "people stopped dressing up." Duh!) All of the gossipy details are here, like Donna Karan's legendary hissy fits. So, too, is the business side, such as the wheeling and dealing pre-*Wall Street*. Many of the stories, though, remain semidetached, without much of a connection except the names and the rags industry itself. *Barbara Jacobs*

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