

‘Styling’ the Royal Mail Way



On May 15, declaring “Fashionistas get ready,” British Royal Mail honored ten of Britain’s world famous fashion designers by showcasing their iconic designs on ten new stamps. The “Great British Fashion” issue brings together some of the very best of post-war British fashion.

The idea for the issue came from this 2009 British Design Classics stamps, which featured Mary Quant’s daring mini skirt. This proved to be one of the most popular of the ten stamps featured in the issue, prompting the decision to dedicate an entire issue to Britain’s world-class designers. Left to right, top row first, the ten stamps are described by Royal Mail as follows:



- Sir Edwin Hardy Amies became managing director of Mayfair couture house Lachesse in 1934. After World War II he opened his own fashion business in Savile Row. Amies was the first major European fashion designer to venture into ready-to-wear and in 1955 received a Royal Warrant as a dressmaker to Queen Elizabeth II. Other commissions have included clothing for the 1966 England World Cup squad and the 1972 GB Olympic squad and the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The outfit shown on the stamp dates from the late 1940s.

- Sir Norman Hartnell opened his first couture house in Mayfair in 1923. He was a Dressmaker to Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother, and Queen Elizabeth II. The stamp shows an outfit created by Hartnell in the 1950s.

- Granny Takes a Trip was a boutique opened in February 1965 at Kings Road in London’s Chelsea, by Nigel Weymouth, Sheila Cohen and John Pearse. The shop, which was acquired by Freddie Hornik in 1969, remained open until the mid-70s and has been called the “first psychedelic boutique in Groovy London of the 1960s.” The jacket shown on the stamp was designed by John Pearse using a Morris & Co. furniture fabric print called Golden Lily.

- Raymond “Ossie” Clark was a major figure in the Swinging Sixties scene in London and the fashion industry in that era. He is now renowned for his vintage designs by present-day designers and is compared to the 1960s fashion greats Mary Quant and Biba. He has influenced many other designers, including Yves Saint Laurent, Anna Sui and Tom Ford. The outfit shown on the stamp here dates from the late 1960s and features a print by Celia Birtwell.

- Tommy Nutter recreated the Savile Row suit in the 1960s. In 1969, he joined with Edward Sexton, to open Nutters of Saville Row. Nutter combined traditional tailoring skills with innovative design.

His clients included Mick Jagger and Elton John. He was most proud of the fact that he dressed three out of the four Beatles on the cover of their Abbey Road album. The suit on the stamp was designed for Ringo Starr and was recreated especially for the photo shoot.

- Jean Muir took a stockroom job at Liberty & Co in 1950. Despite formal art training, she was given the chance to sketch in Liberty’s ready-to-wear department, which led to her gaining a job as designer for Jaeger in 1956. Famous clients include former Muir model Joanna Lumley, Charlotte Rampling and Maggie Smith. The outfit featured here dates to the late 70s/early 80s.

- Zandra Rhodes was one of the new wave of British designers who put London at the forefront of the international fashion scene in the 1970s. Her designs are considered clear, creative statements, dramatic but graceful, bold but feminine. Her inspiration came from organic material and nature. With her bright green hair (later pink and sometimes red or other colors), theatrical makeup and art jewelry, she stamped her own clear identity on the international world of fashion. Rhodes designed for Princess Diana and continues to design for royalty and celebrities, including several outfits for Freddie Mercury. The early 80s gold “Royal” dress shown here comes from her personal collection.

- Dame Vivienne Westwood is largely responsible for bringing punk fashion into the mainstream. In the mid-1970s with Malcolm McLaren, Westwood created clothes drawing inspiration from bikers, fetishists and prostitutes, which McLaren sold from his Kings Road boutique. When McLaren became manager of the Sex Pistols, the band wore Westwood and McLaren’s designs. The “punk style” included bondage gear, safety pins, razor blades, bicycle or lavatory chains on clothing and spiked dog collars for jewelry.

Westwood’s work includes the adoption of traditional elements of Scottish design, such as tartan fabric, and the reinterpretation of 17th- and 18th-century cloth cutting principles. The 1993 Harlequin dress shown here was modeled by Naomi Campbell.

- Sir Paul Smith wanted to be a racing cyclist, but a cycling accident put an end to those hopes. By later spending time with friends he met in the hospital he decided to be a designer. He took evening tailoring classes and later joined Lincroft Kilgour in Savile Row, where his designs were worn by celebrities, including George Best. He opened his first shop in 1970. In 1976 Smith’s first menswear collection was shown in Paris, under the Paul Smith label. In 1998, he showed his first women’s collection at London Fashion Week. He remains fully involved, including designing clothes in a business that now has show-rooms in London, Paris, Milan, New York and Tokyo. The suit on the stamp dates from around 2003.

- Lee Alexander McQueen was a fashion designer and couturier best known for his in-depth knowledge of bespoke British tailoring, his tendency to juxtapose strength with fragility in his collections, and the emotional power and raw energy of his provocative fashion shows. He worked as chief designer at Givenchy from 1996 to 2001 and founded his own label under the name Alexander McQueen. His achievements have earned four British Designer of the Year awards, as well as an International Designer of the Year award in 2003. The piece shown on the stamp is “Black Raven” from McQueen’s Horn of Plenty 2009 collection.