

# Fashion designers and history essay sample

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

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1. [Vivienne Westwood](#) \n \t
2. [Zandra Rhodes](#) \n \t
3. [Works Cited](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

Innovations and various developments have been developed over time to in attaining the modern day fashion and design. The predecessors of fashion and design formed a core background for the various designers that emerged after them; hence, their designs were used as reference designs. The borrowing of ideas in fashion designs is common in the development of fashion. Outstanding designs have been used as a source of inspiration and motivation for upcoming designers. This evaluates how Vivienne Westwood and Zandra Rhodes have drawn inspiration from historical dresses in the pre 19th century.

Zandra Rhodes carried out an extensive research on outstanding designs and borrowed ideas and concepts to develop new designs. One of her remarkable designs include the evening ensemble, which she designed in 1981 after a research on previous designs from Victoria and Albert Museums. Additionally, she designed a dramatic black quilted-satin bodice, which had a gold-pleated polyamide, panniers, lameskirt, and polyester from a design that had been made in the eighteenth century. Following this great accomplishment, she donated it to the library as an artefact (Murphy 16).

A British designer, Vivienne Westwood made most of his designs using designs that had been completed previously and kept. He was majorly

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inspired by designs that had been completed in the nineteenth and eighteenth century respectively. She designed her portrait collection of 1990-1, autumn/winter, using insights and designs that had been borrowed in the eighteenth century. These included a dress, which she made using styles borrowed from Franchois Boucher's paintings (Murphy 17). This paper gives an account of the approaches that Vivienne Westwood and Zandra Rhodes took to come up with designs, which have significantly influenced the growth of the fashion industry. The designers engaged in constant and extensive research to develop new improved designs, which would be successfully linked to the reference designs that had been completed in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

## **Vivienne Westwood**

Vivienne Westwood's fashion collections mostly portray the past since her debut in 1971. She copies and uses the designs that she studies about from history to match it with the present. In her words, she admitted that she copies from the past. She said that she greatly believes in copying because there has never been an era where its people do not appreciate the past or where its people do not show respect for the historical past (Wilcox 9). Most of the designs in her collections were obtained from her detailed studies of the past design styles and techniques. As stated by a postmodern theorist, Frederic Jameson, in 1984, the current application of the historical past only renders it with no meaning and making it only meaningful through fashion (Evans 26). In the 1980s and 1990s, Westwood's collections were mainly a replica of the historical past. She used the past as her dress-up closet in recreating new and glamorous up to date designs that made one glamorous

and flashy (Evans 22).

Her collection of 1983 which, working with her then business partner and lover by the name Malcolm McLaren, they called it 'Pirate' was an inspiration from an intaglio of the 18th century of a pirate in the Victoria and Albert Museum. This fashion collection gave her great reputation in the fashion industry. Her trouser from the pirate collection was a replica of a design of the 18th century of males' pair of shorts that she found in the Art Library of the National Museum. According to her, there had to be somebody who has gratitude for the historical past, and she demonstrated her appreciation for the past through fashion and design (Wilcox 9). In her statement, she says that if an individual takes a good look into the past he or she will see that the past too had a certain level of distinction and brilliance in the manner in which activities were carried out and how things were made. She says that when you replicate a skill, in the end, you will create your skills (Wilcox 9). In the spring/summer of 1985, she designed the Mini-Crini, which was a short, full skirt that had a boning made from plastic. In this design collection, she got her inspiration from the 19th-century crinoline and from a dancing performance, which she had attended. That same summer she designed the Harris Tweed, bright red in colour and woven by hand, which she got the inspiration from the traditional children's coat with double breasts. In her next designs, which she named 'Britain Must Go Pagan' she incorporated a series of effects, including Sevres porcelain and scenes portraying Greek pornography. This collection was a controversy in her works between her honours for the past and culture and her affection for irony and romantic freedom. Next, she incorporated classical garment with the check of the

Prince of Wales, Fair Isle pullovers that had patterns of computer games, and eloquent coats that had sleeves that could be removed. She got the inspiration from the primitive armour in designing this collection.

The next collection was the ' Miss Marple' suit, which was made in Harris Tweed that was thorn proof, and in this collection, the men's short coats in the neo-classical era inspired her. Her designs of hand made and machine made pair of shirts and jeans were an inspiration from a certain costume of the 17th century, while the coats inexpensively sewn silk were an inspiration from the 18th century ' spatified' undercoat. In addition, she closely studied the works of the French fashion designer, Christian Dior, who lived between 1905 and 1957 and incorporated his techniques to design the Erotic Zones in the spring and summer of 1995. This collection had a superb feminine outlook.

## **Zandra Rhodes**

The British Traditional manufacturers accused most of her initial designs of being controversial. Rhodes and her colleague, Sylvia Ayton had a boutique that they called Fulham Road clothes shop. Ayton made the clothes while Rhodes was in charge of supplying the garments for making the clothes. This business relationship lasted between 1966 and 1969 then each one of them went their separate ways. The lifestyle of Rhodes is that of drama and glamour. Her inspiration has been mostly from organic materials and nature itself (Zandra and Knight 14). Her style of design is through the utilization open seams and safety pins that are made from jewellery. She used this style mostly at the time of the punk era. Her designs of the 1970s and the 1980s were mostly an inspiration from the wrappings of the Egyptian mums

and the feathers of the peacocks that were found in India.

In the autumn/winter of 1981, she designed a collection of an evening dress that was a replica of one of the 18th-century dress, which she had learned about at the V&A. The designer donated this dress to the V&A museum.

Another design, which is a replica of a historic design, is the ' Sparkle' print, which she created in the 1970s. This fashion design is a replica of a design that was developed in at the beginning of the 17th century. She learned about this design in the Victoria and Albert museum. She made another replica of the same in 2013. On the other hand, the slash is a fashion style that dates back to the time of King Henri II of the then French Kingdom between 1547 and 1559. Rhodes has used the slash in most of her designs, thus, showing respect and appreciation of the designs in the historic past.

The interesting thing about Rhodes is that she often uses her past designs as her inspiration too. For instance, there are certain designs that are specifically known as Zandra Rhodes standards that are redesigned every year, for example, her best seller dress, the ' 73/74' that is commonly called by the number of its style. This is a female dress made of silk that was first designed in 1973. It has a V-neck, the sleeves are long and wide, and a skirt that is full in length. Another of her standards is the dress with one shoulder that was initially designed in 1974, which has been redesigned to date.

In her ' Elizabethan slashed silk' design, which she developed in 1971, the inspiration came from two collections that she got from a museum in New York, the American Indian Museum. They had the shapes of the primitive American clothing from the 16th century. The slashed garment was inspired by the ' Elizabethan slashed silks' that was a design style of the 16th

century, which she read about at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The designing of the 'renaissance/gold collection', on the other hand, was an inspiration of a multiple merger of the noble wedding and the historical clothing dating way back to the Elizabethan era, and from a collection of costumes from historical times in the V&A museum (Zandra 67).

The historical attire dating back to the primitive era influenced the design of the primitive collection of 1983. She incorporated the dressing culture of several countries in the ancient times to design this collection. The types of dresses in this collection include hats that were made from wires with intense decorations that she borrowed from the 15th century, sleeves that hang, a style borrowed from the early 14th century, and aprons that she got from design styles of the late 14th century. A group of travellers that Rhodes met, on the other hand, inspired the design of the 'Ukraine and Chevron Shawl'. This design was also inspired by her detailed study on the 'Victorian Shawls' at the V&A museum. At the museum, she drew pictures of the design, which she later on created in 1970. She designed this collection using the style she had used before in 1969 in designing the 'Knitted Circle'. In the design of the 'Chevron shawl' she used a variety of garments, for example, calico for a pointy jacket, silk chiffon for female clothing like skirts and dresses, and a large number of polished dresses (Zandra 33).

Therefore, from the discussion on the two designers, it can be seen that design is a field of specialization where the designers have the liberty of either using their own designing skills or replicating by improving on the design styles by their predecessors. The designers can study the works done by those designers who came before them and improved on their works.

They can also incorporate several techniques not limited to their skills and that of their predecessors as long as the styles employed will add value to their fashion and design. For example, the designer may choose to make his or her collections based on the nature, living creatures in their surroundings and plantations like flowers. However, in this paper, I dwelt specifically on how the designers used the historic past as their inspiration. By studying the works of their predecessors archived in museums, these designers have been excelling in their field of specialization from the fact that they have managed to dress iconic figures in history for example Princess Diana, Elizabeth Taylor, the Prince of Wales and many others.

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