History Of The Bustle

1884   1886   1889

History of the bustle traces a fascinating evolution of women's fashion, reflecting societal changes and cultural influences over time. The bustle, a padded undergarment worn to accentuate the back of a woman's dress, became a hallmark of Victorian fashion and continued to influence styles well into the early 20th century. This article delves into its origins, transformations, and impact on women's clothing, highlighting key periods and notable styles.

Origins of the Bustle

The bustle's roots can be traced back to the 19th century, during a time when women's fashion was characterized by elaborate silhouettes that emphasized an hourglass figure. The concept of enhancing the posterior can be linked to various historical precedents:

Early Influences

1. Crinolines and Hoops: Before the bustle emerged, women wore crinolines and hoop skirts that created volume in the skirt. These garments were popular in the mid-1800s and provided a structured silhouette that paved the way for the bustle's introduction.

2. Historical Precedents: Garments such as the farthingale in the 16th century and the panier in the 18th century also emphasized the back and sides of a woman's silhouette, showcasing a long-standing preference for accentuating the body's curves.

Development of the Bustle

The bustle as a distinct fashion accessory began to gain popularity in the 1860s. It was designed to lift and support the back of a dress, creating a pronounced shape that became

synonymous with the Victorian aesthetic.

1. Early Bustles (1860s): Initially, bustles were simply padded cushions or rolls placed under the fabric of the dress. These early versions were less structured and often made from cotton or horsehair.

2. The Bustle Frame (1870s): As the decade progressed, the bustle evolved into a more defined structure. Designers began creating metal or wooden frames that provided greater support and shape. The use of wire frames allowed for more elaborate styles and varying degrees of fullness.

The Bustle in the Victorian Era

During the height of the Victorian era, the bustle became a symbol of femininity and social status. The garment played a crucial role in fashion and was frequently featured in high society events.

Fashion Trends of the 1870s and 1880s

The 1870s and 1880s were marked by significant variations in bustle styles:

1. The Early Bustle (1870-1875):
- The early forms were relatively small and created a gentle curve.
- Dress styles often featured draped fabric and were complemented by ruffles and bows.

2. The Late Bustle (1876-1880):
- This period saw a dramatic increase in the size of the bustle, with some styles featuring a pronounced shelf-like effect.
- Dresses were designed with longer trains and more intricate embellishments, emphasizing the rear silhouette.

3. S-bend Silhouette (1890s):
- The 1890s introduced the S-bend silhouette, where the bust and hips were accentuated, leading to a more exaggerated bustle.
- This style required women to adopt a particular posture, affecting how they moved and carried themselves.

The Bustle's Decline and Resurgence

Despite its popularity, the bustle began to decline in the late 19th century with the advent of the 20th century. However, it experienced a brief resurgence in different forms.

Decline in Popularity (1890s-1900s)

1. Shift Toward Simplicity: The turn of the 20th century ushered in a new era of fashion that favored simplicity and practicality. The bustle fell out of favor as designers began to embrace more streamlined silhouettes.

2. The Edwardian Era (1900-1910): While the bustle was still present, it underwent significant transformation:
- The use of soft draping and lighter fabrics began to replace the rigid structures of earlier bustles.
- The "tea gown" emerged, which was less constrictive and allowed for greater freedom of movement.

Revival of the Bustle (1910s-1920s)

1. The Return of the Bustle: In the 1910s, the bustle made a comeback in more subtle forms. Designers incorporated draping and layering techniques that echoed earlier styles, but with a modern twist.

2. Influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement: The Arts and Crafts movement, which emphasized handmade and artisanal work, influenced fashion during this time. Bustles were often adorned with intricate embroidery and embellishments that reflected this ethos.

Bustle in Modern Fashion

Though the bustle largely faded from mainstream fashion after the 1920s, its influence can still be seen in contemporary designs.

Contemporary Interpretations

1. High Fashion: Modern designers occasionally reference the bustle in their collections, using it to create dramatic silhouettes on the runway. Fashion houses like Dolce & Gabbana and Alexander McQueen have played with the concept, incorporating bustles into their avant-garde designs.

2. Bridal Fashion: Bustles have found a lasting niche in bridal wear. Many wedding dresses feature bustles that allow for a dramatic train during the ceremony while transforming into a manageable style for the reception.

3. Costume Design: The bustle remains a popular choice in theatrical and film costume design, helping to evoke the elegance of the Victorian era and the complexity of women's fashion during that time.

Conclusion

The history of the bustle is a testament to the evolving nature of women's fashion and societal norms. From its origins in the 19th century to its adaptations in modern design, the bustle reflects a continuous dialogue between aesthetics, function, and femininity. Understanding this historical trajectory not only enriches our appreciation of fashion but also highlights the cultural significance of clothing as an expression of identity and status. As fashion continues to evolve, the legacy of the bustle serves as a reminder of the intricate relationship between style and the social fabric of the times.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the origin of the bustle in women's fashion?

The bustle originated in the mid-19th century as a fashion accessory that accentuated the back of women's dresses, primarily becoming popular during the Victorian era, around the 1870s.

How did the design of the bustle evolve throughout the 19th century?

Initially, bustles were made from fabric and padding to create volume at the back of skirts. By the late 19th century, they evolved into more structured forms, including wire and metal frameworks, allowing for more dramatic shapes.

What societal factors contributed to the popularity of the bustle?

The bustle's popularity was influenced by changing social norms, the desire for women's fashion to reflect femininity and modesty, and the impact of industrialization, which allowed for mass production of clothing.

When did the bustle fall out of fashion, and what replaced it?

The bustle began to decline in popularity by the turn of the 20th century, around 1900, as the Edwardian silhouette emerged, favoring a more straight and natural line without the exaggerated back.

How has the bustle been reinterpreted in modern fashion?

In recent years, the bustle has seen a revival in contemporary fashion, often incorporated into wedding dresses and vintage-inspired designs, showcasing a blend of historical styles with modern aesthetics.

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