



England's Eccentrics: *The British have always maintained a relaxed relationship with their icons because they are quirkier than elsewhere.*

Zandra Rhodes

Legendary British designer Dame Zandra Rhodes brought street style to couture with an establishment take on punk, stamping her indelible mark on the international fashion scene from the 70s onwards

As dazzling as a work of psychedelic art, Zandra Rhodes wears a magenta boiler suit perfectly in sync with her hot pink hair, crimson lips, and kohl-rimmed green eyes smudged in electric blue. We chat in her technicolour penthouse, situated above the Fashion and Textile museum she founded in 2003. It is London Fashion Week, on the eve of her AW/19 presentation "The Golden Hour" mainly inspired by the "strong, empowered women" she has discovered and had the pleasure of working with in her 50-year fashion industry career. The multi award-winning artist marks a remarkable five-decade career this year, and her influence on the industry is not waning.

Stars from the worlds of music, fashion, film and royalty; Rhodes has dressed them all. Yet, Freddie Mercury in the white satin cape that she made for him in the 70s, is one of the most enduring images. Unfazed by the warp speed of the fashion industry nowadays, she is pragmatic. "I think you have to go with the flow," she says, "but it gets faster and faster and you have to pray that you'll manage it." Brexit is, she says, "awful! I think this country is making a bad decision, it will affect far too many industries including fashion; I hope there is another vote."

In Stockholm this January, Rhodes' home and studio were recreated as part of an exhibition at the Formex Design Fair. Replicated right down to the rainbow-coloured floor and Z-shaped furniture, they even borrowed the sculpture of Rhodes' head by the artist Andrew Logan, her great friend. It was the perfect setting to showcase her SS/19 collection, "Looking Back, Looking Forward". Before the show she said: "You just pray that the world likes what you do and that you can follow on with it."

Rhodes' initiated a new movement in 1969 by cutting her circular print design to dictate the shape of the garment. "It was some sort of exotic fantasy where the textile really took over," she says of her debut collection, Knitted Circle. And, as if a virtual tornado had whipped it up and placed it firmly at the feet of the American and English press, it was promptly featured in American Vogue. The print is still used today, as is the 1968 Lipstick print, which became the motif 'Love Blade' for Valentino SS/17, the result of a collaboration between Rhodes and Pierpaolo Piccioli, the brand's creative director.

Conceptual Chic, however, was the collection that earned Rhodes the title 'Princess of Punk' in 1977. Her gold safety pins were beaded with pearls and the edges around the holes in the jersey fabric were hand-stitched. Rhodes' work was now known as revolutionary.

Vintage pieces from Rhodes' prolific body of work are collected by the designer and film director Tom Ford, the designer Anna Sui and American Vogue's European editor-at-large, Hamish Bowles. More than 500 screens are stored at her London print room and some of the prints from her earliest collections are still used today. Among the many awards that she holds are nine honorary doctorates from British and American universities; and in November 2018, Rhodes was presented with a Lifetime Achievement award in Dallas.

A favourite restaurant is The Wolsey, she loves visiting the V&A on a Friday night, and believes Bermondsey is the best [area in] London right now: "It's an up and coming hub with a great vibe." London Fashion Week in September will be ramping up the celebrations as Rhodes turns 79. There will be the launch of a new retrospective book, Zandra Rhodes, 50 Fabulous Years of Fashion, an exhibition, and a documentary, Zandra With A Zee, filmed by Bridie O'Sullivan. "Things have been so busy and so fabulous for us," she says. "It's been crazy!" *Alexandra Kohut-Cole*