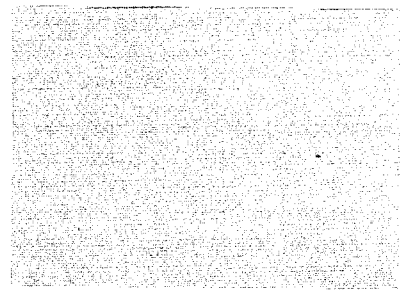


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# THE

# 80s



It had to happen. After the swinging sixties and the excesses of 1970s punk rock, there had to be a backlash. It came in the 1980s, with the art of being serious, grown-up and hard-working carried to the extreme.

But the decade didn't start quite like that. The punk revolution was still in the air – though by 1980, the general

trend was to tone down and tame the original punk style. Pop stars such as Prince and Boy George, for example, did not look threatening but rather appealing with their careful makeup and colorful clothes. As the shock effect of outrageous Mohawk hairstyles wore off, even they became simply another form of decoration – just one more fashion. The mood was

whimsical and soft, with velvet knickerbockers and short cheerleader skirts. In Britain romance was in the air, with the engagement of Prince Charles and "Lady Di" in September 1980. Their marriage the following July, televised worldwide, fulfilled all expectations. The bride's fairy-tale dress was copied over and over again for less exalted weddings and helped



to set the trend for full-blown romantic evening wear. Were the eighties to be yet another decade of escapist fantasies?

**Conventional Prince: Prince Charles and "Lady Di" pose for a formal portrait after announcing their engagement.**

## Enter the Yuppies

In fact this mood did not last long and the decade soon began to show its true colors. Just as the mini-skirted teenage girl became the symbol of the sixties, so the well-tailored young executive, quickly dubbed a "yuppie," summed up the eighties spirit of hard work and individual responsibility.

This was not just a whim of fashion but a widespread social trend. The election of Ronald Reagan as US president in 1980 ushered in a new decade when it became fashionable to make money and dress well. The Reagans put in motion a fast social whirl, centered around the White House, with smart fund-raising luncheons and evening charity affairs. Just as Ronald Reagan's successful election bid against Jimmy Carter set a new political tone, so Nancy Reagan's designer wardrobe was a total contrast to the informal style of Rosalynn Carter, the former first lady. It was now "in" to celebrate success conspicuously in business or politics with fashionable clothes and accessories. It was not just the West that was encouraging these values. In the USSR, with Mikhail Gorbachev at the helm, some forms of private enterprise began to be promoted and profit was seen as a healthy incentive.

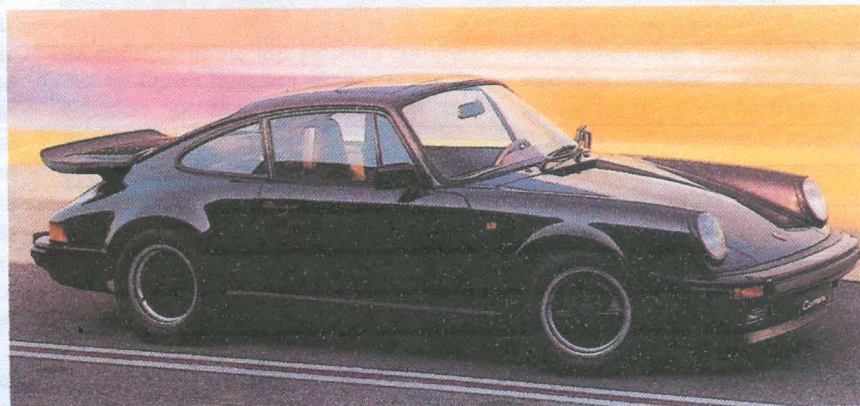
The election of 69-year-old Ronald Reagan was also very much in tune with the demographic changes taking place in North America and Western Europe. Teenagers, if not exactly a dying breed, were dwindling in number as the effects of birth control and marriage at a later age took effect. Youth culture no longer dominated the scene. These changes began to affect fashions as designers and, more important, their financial backers realized money was no longer to be made by aiming for the teenage market. The people they needed to attract were the older professionals who were not only increasing in number but also had the extra income to spend on expensive clothing. Fashion had to become serious



**Dressed for success (1): Nancy and Ronald Reagan at their second inauguration ball, January 1985.**

**The essential accessory for the well-dressed achiever: an immaculate black Porsche.**

and recognize that this new breed of consumers did not want gimmicks but clothes that could see them through one business meeting after another.

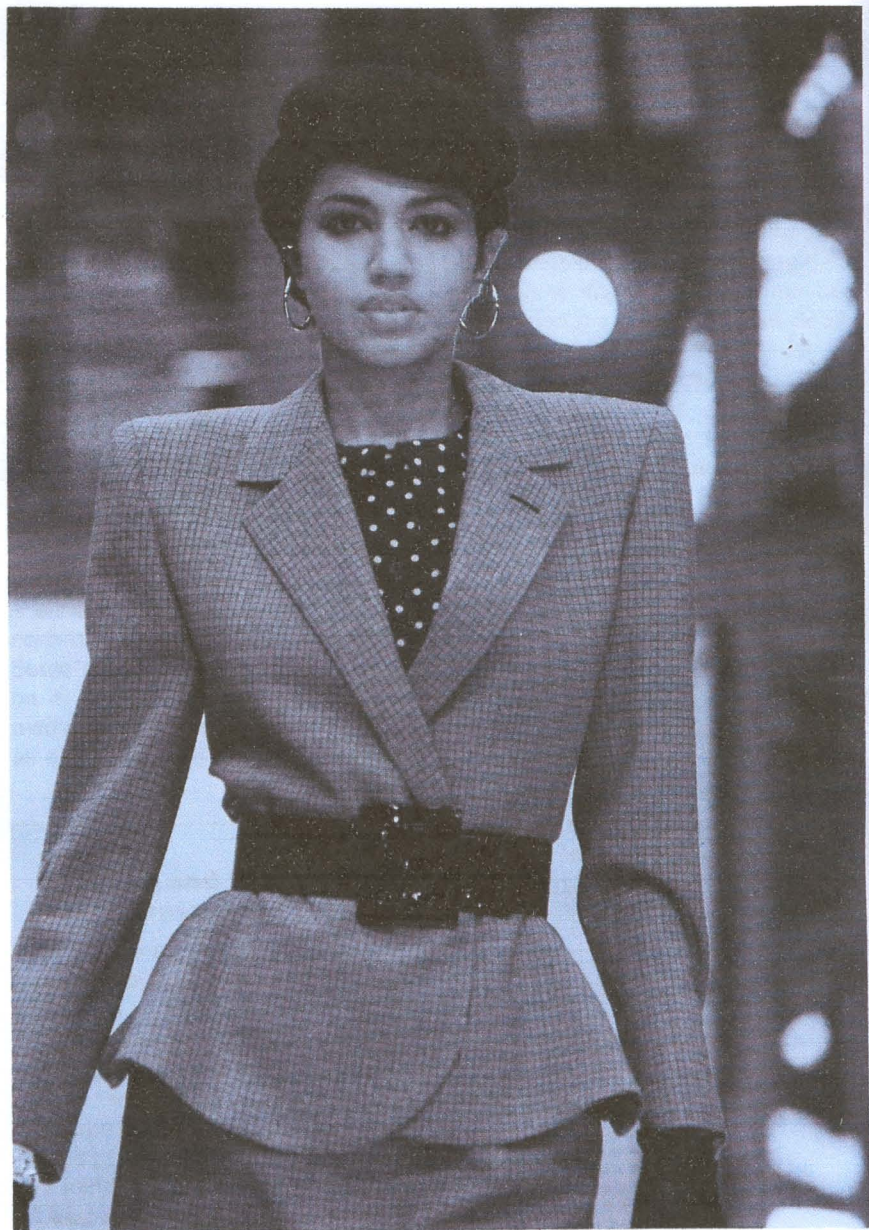


## Designer Shopping

Calvin Klein, Giorgio Armani and Ralph Lauren targeted their clothes and accessories to this new emerging group, and became three of the most successful fashion emperors of the decade. They spearheaded a "total-look" style of shopping, providing their busy customers with everything they needed, from underwear to overcoats, under one designer label. By the end of the decade, designer-manufacturer Donna Karan was being called "the queen of 7th Avenue" for her toned-down, working women's high-style, yet comfortable, clothing and accessories.

Many large department stores were rearranged to cater to this new way of merchandizing. Inside the stores you no longer looked for the skirt or dress section but went straight to the designer boutique of your choice to add another item to your well-coordinated wardrobe. This at least was the ideal, but many a shopper must have cursed as they made their way from designer boutique to designer boutique in search of a simple item of clothing. Designer accessories, such as Gucci handbags and Rolex watches, became another important status symbol for the "designer shopper."

Chainstores for the younger buyer also adopted this approach. The Italian group Benetton, for example, with franchises in 57 countries, was enormously successful with its instantly recognizable coordinated separates. Even sport and leisure wear came under the influence of designer labels and coordinating shapes and colors. It was not enough to stay in shape – you needed to look good while doing so. On the ski slopes the styles and colors of ski pants changed each season and ski boots themselves became more complex and hi-tech every year. Leotards for workout sessions became high fashion, and trainers had to sport a big name label such as Nike or Reebok to be in fashion. Even the Olympics were almost as much about style



as sport, with the top athletes competing in figure-hugging outfits – not to mention all the razzmatazz of the opening ceremonies.

The 1980s also saw the wearing of trainers move from the playing field, sprint track and health club onto the feet of thousands of working women. Most notably, the widely publicized 1980 New York City transit strike resulted in the popular acceptance of running shoes for the long walk to work. The style quickly gained acceptance and it became commonplace to

see otherwise impeccably groomed working women wearing running shoes for trips to and from their jobs. It was a rare eighties woman (or man) who did not own at least one pair of these comfortable shoes.

**Symbol of the eighties – the yuppie woman in her designer suit.**

**Day and Night – classic eighties couture for day and evening wear, from Claude Montana's autumn 1987 collection. Short skirt, wide shoulders and assertive lines link all these designs.**

## New Women

Just as men were using old female tricks to perk up their appearance so women were at the old game of stealing from the male wardrobe and adapting men's clothing to their needs. This was by no means surprising as more and more women became accepted in high-status jobs. Although the average female earned less than her male counterpart, the female executive was very much a part of the eighties. Her office outfit borrowed from traditional menswear, with various styles of skirt and jacket becoming standard wear. Shoulder pads added width to the female form and lent an air of authority. Perhaps even more than men, women in successful careers had to look good as well as be good at their jobs and exude an aura of success. In the US, 1984 vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro's style of "power dressing" was a key factor in her political success, while British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher paid a considerable amount of attention to her appearance – using her manner and dress as one of her tools to win confidence and elections. In a 1985 interview, Thatcher admitted to being a keen reader of *Vogue* magazine. In contrast, the British opposition parties never found anyone, male or female, with a comparable eighties style to challenge her.

## East Meets West

The most original ideas of the eighties came from Japanese designers, who showed another way of mixing up the sexes and challenged all the accepted ideas of femininity. The "new" dressing pioneered by Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons and Yohji Yamamoto totally disguised the shape of the body beneath layers of clothing that were often geometric and asymmetric in shape. These clothes rejected traditional Western notions of women's clothes – they were neither obviously feminine nor conventionally decorative. Their unglamorous, functional

nature appeared radical to Western eyes, although many of the designs were firmly rooted in Japanese tradition and could almost be seen as a homage to the country's past and a challenge to the increased Western influence there. Men and women were dressed in carefully constructed shapes, echoing kimonos or the simpler shapes of karate jackets.

In the West the new designs struck an immediate chord with the young, who found they had a liking for these stark, severe designs. Black, the color most favored by the Japanese designers, became a widespread uniform for youth. There was an undercurrent of violence in some of the designs, with torn and slashed cloth wrapped around the body – although in a very stylized way, in contrast to the anarchic style of punk. Some saw in this a sidelong comment on a decade when natural and man-made disasters were looked on by some as a portent of the end of the world.

## Politics and the Environment

A terrifying explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear reactor near Kiev in the Soviet Union in April 1986 focused the growing concern about man-made threats to the world environment. The Green party in West Germany and groups like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth had led the way, but now environmental issues were taken up by political parties of all colors. Campaigns highlighted the possible threat of global warming – the Greenhouse Effect – supposedly caused by burning fossil fuels, and the destruction of rain forests; depletion of the protective ozone layer by chemical emissions; and wide-scale industrial pollution. The dilemma, especially for underdeveloped countries, was how to balance environmental protection with economic growth.

## Debt and Famine

In the 1970s the West's commercial banks lent huge amounts of money to developing countries. A decade later, unexpectedly high interest rates and economic recession made repayment difficult or impossible for a number of nations. Debt crises in South America and sub-Saharan Africa threatened the stability of the world's banking and financial systems, and the livelihoods of millions in debtor countries were stretched to breaking point by the burden of debt. The biggest sums were owed by Brazil and Mexico, but Africa, owing a total of \$200 billion, saw the most desperate results as near-bankrupt nations were simultaneously hit by drought, causing widespread famine and poverty. Western creditors debated solutions, but in the 1980s the net flow of funds continued from poor to rich nations.

Japanese construction. Rei Kawakubo designs for 1981.

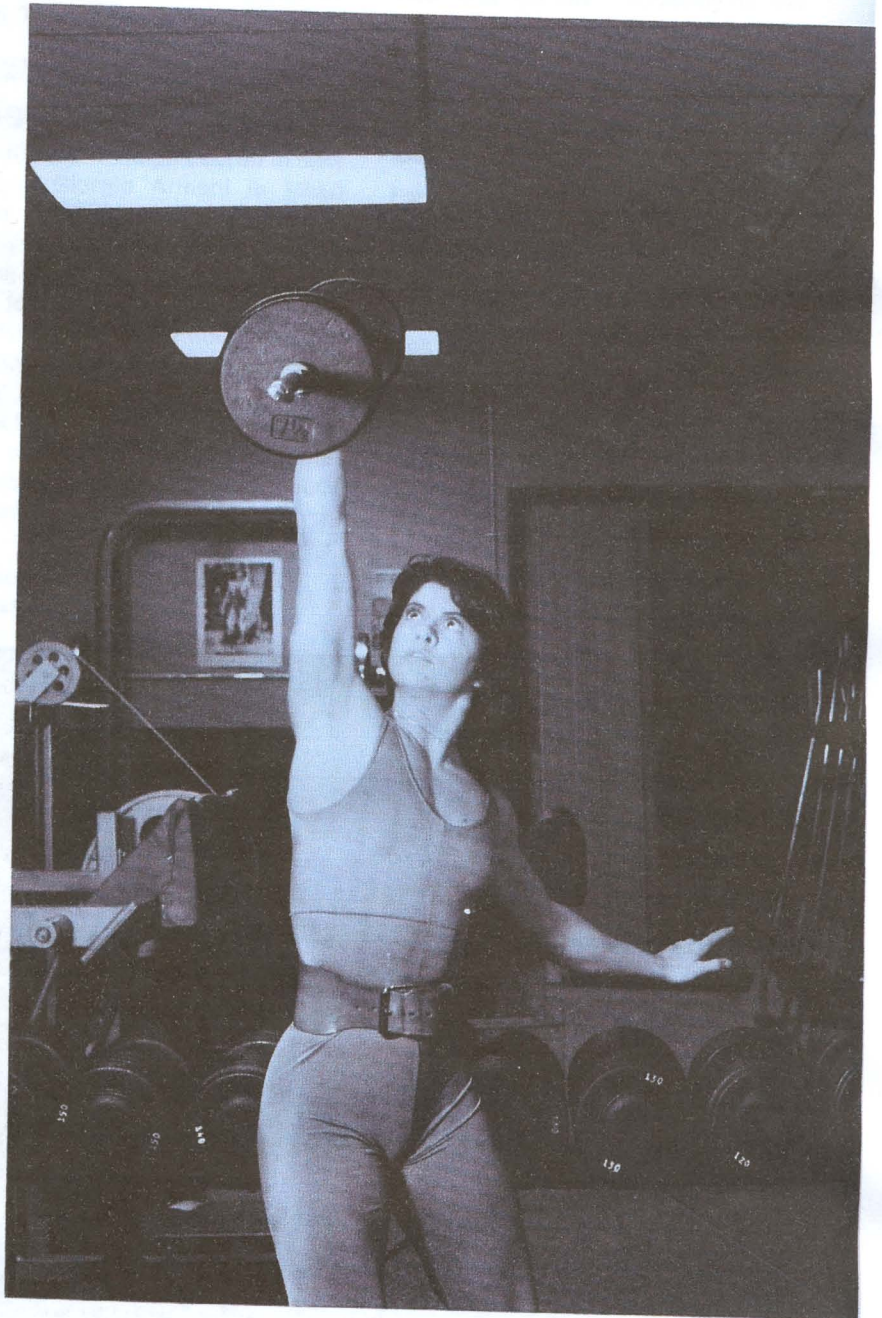
# Power Dressing: The City Slicker and the New Woman

## Enter the Yuppies

**A**n important new market for designer clothes was tapped in the 1980s: men and women in their twenties and early thirties in high-paying jobs. Hard work was fashionable and a large salary something to be shown off in expensive cars and designer clothes. European companies were increasingly abandoning their more traditional approach to recruitment and adopting the American practice of rewarding young talents fast with good jobs and good salaries. The term "yuppie," standing for "young upwardly mobile professional," was coined to describe the phenomenon. While few would admit to being one, the "yuppie" market became an important target for advertisers selling everything from cars to instant coffee through portraying a wealthy, successful, hard-working but young life-style.

## The Aggressive Silhouette

The look produced by the designers in the early 1980s for this market was, essentially, based on the male silhouette. Wide shoulders were the key, emphasized with pads. For the day, the suit was essential for both the working man and woman. His was, typically, double-breasted with front-pleated trousers, creating a broad, powerful image. For her the jacket was worn over a safe on or below-the-knee-length narrow skirt. The classic Armani jacket, hanging loosely from wide shoulders, disguised the waist and narrowed the hips, leaving hair, makeup and legs to proclaim femininity. In contrast to the aggressive exterior, underneath



**Bodybuilding – for both sexes – was an eighties craze. Bodybuilders shared many goals with power dressers – the desire to be noticed,**

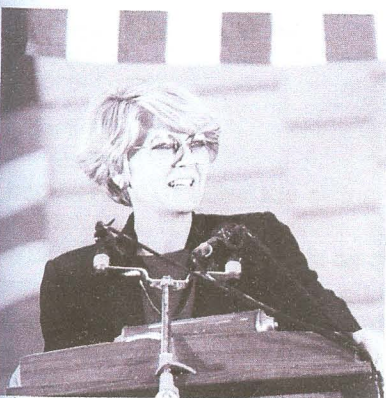
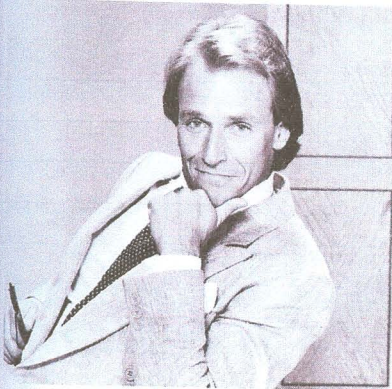
**and to appear commanding and confident in all situations.**

many women began to wear frilly feminine underwear, and companies such as Victoria's Secret capitalized on the market for these garments. Glamor was kept for evenings. The increasing popularity of formal events such as charity balls was an opportunity for female display, while men were provided with a ready uniform in the dinner jacket or tuxedo.

Beneath the clothes the body too was being molded into a powerful form. Exercise was important in the 1970s but concentrated on slimming down the figure. In the early 1980s body building and exercise machines became the fashionable way to stay in shape. The aim, for women as well as for men, was to attain a strong, powerful figure. The most extreme profes-

**Television helped spread the power dressing message. Characters in "Dallas," "Dynasty" and "LA Law" dressed to impress – and the public followed suit.**

**Geraldine Ferraro on the campaign trail – power dressing at work.**



sional female bodybuilders upset all conventional ideas of the female form, echoing the rejection of the traditional feminine role by the successful businesswomen. In 1983 Calvin Klein summed up this mood, perhaps lightheartedly, with his jockey shorts for women. They proved to be a best-seller.

### **Designer Life-style**

Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren in New York and Giorgio Armani in Milan worked this "yuppie" market to the hilt. They realized the importance of creating and controlling the right image for their clothes through their own advertising, rather than leaving it to fashion editors to bring them to the buyers' notice. They could provide a total look not to be mixed with anyone else's designs. They lived the life-style they designed for, being as much astute and successful businessmen as

**Sylvester Stallone – but are those shoulders really all his?**



creative designers. The importance of hitting the right image was shown by the success of the German designer Hugo Boss. His sales soared by 21 percent when his suits were worn by television actors starring in "Miami Vice" and "LA Law." Suddenly he was selling not just a beautifully tailored suit but an exciting and successful image.

### **Boom or Bust?**

For a short while after the 1987 stock market crash it seemed as if the yuppie look and life-style were going into retreat. But this never quite happened. The aggressive fashionable look certainly softened, with shoulder pads for women becoming less important and men's suits slimmer in line. But the overall look remained important throughout the eighties, with the business suit for men and women an important fashion item. The designer empires built up on this market continued to flourish and looked set to expand in the 1990s.