

Le Smoking Tuxedo

IMAGES THROUGH A THEODOLITE

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Parisian fashion of the 1960s was witness to winds of change. And the world followed suit.

The riff of women's styling was slowly playing a varied tune, one that saw a flow of inspiration drawn from men's fashion of the time and that of the yesteryears.

Of all things borrowed from the gentlemen, the white shirt stood out and has remained a fashion staple even for women. While some have let their imagination run wild in creating myriad tops and blouses from this indispensable basic, others have kept matters simpler without much change. Yet, androgynous fashion has more to thank to boy's fashion, and 'le smoking tuxedo' is just one of them — the timeless creation of Yves Saint Laurent (YSL).

Perhaps, the most suave and sensuous of his creations, Le Smoking debuted in the Autumn-Winter Collection of 1966, and has, over the decades, inspired designers

to create and re-create their own versions of the feminine jacket. If you, as a woman, love to put on a suit, just know that it all goes back to the mid-sixties, when YSL was exploring uncharted territories. He was already established in the Parisian fashion circle, and as former head of design at Dior, no stranger to international fame.

The decade of the '60s saw YSL create master designs that empowered women through fashion. For the artist, this was the turning point, as it was for women's fashion, and for the first time, unisex styling was set to gain widespread acceptance. Women could wear a tux; be feminine with an air of masculinity. For the first time in fashion history, they could carry a suit to dinner, cocktails and the boardroom, which they were frequenting than ever before — and no one screamed faux pas.

Yves Saint Laurent has been known to say, "For a woman, the tuxedo is an indispensable garment in which she will

always feel in style, for it is a stylish garment and not a fashionable garment. Fashions fade, style is eternal." This was an audacious stance for a new design, even though inspired from the tux — a well established men's staple.

The tuxedo had a strange introduction and use in fashion. Men's fashion. This particular garment was originally worn in smoking rooms to protect one's clothing from the smell of tobacco! Needless to say, this is also how the famed Le Smoking Tuxedo got its name. What a giant leap it had been from its humble beginning to blatant glamour.

YSL's tuxedo was not an exact replica of the men's version. In his creative sagacity, he used the same fashion codes, deciphered for the feminine body. To begin with, the collar had a subtler curve and shape; the waistline became narrowed to accentuate the body shape; the pants adjusted to give the legs a 'longer' look. The

fabric of choice was wool and velvet. The colour of the garment — black!

The initial response for Le Smoking was little short of disappointing, and as far as fashion legends go, only one piece was sold in the season!

By the seventies and the mid-eighties, women's tuxedo became mainstream. Every suit that women now sport, be it the casual blazer, or a formal suit, has Le Smoking as its root, and perhaps that is the reason why it has remained a staple. Le Smoking has been out of fashion for a while now and predestined never to have a comeback, as it never really fades in influence. As far as Le Smoking goes, the appeal is real and everlasting, destined to repeat itself on the ramps and in our lives over and over again.

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