



Diana Vreeland

Eleanor Dwight

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In the early 1960s Jackie Kennedy wrote to Diana Vreeland: "you are and always will be my fashion mentor." Vreeland helped the young First Lady create her famous "Jackie look" which was imitated all over America. She had inspired readers of *Harper Bazaar's* with her brilliant tips from the mid 1930s to the early '60s and ran *Vogue* as editor-in-chief in its most innovative years (1963-1972). Then for thirteen years she organized the hugely successful annual costume history shows at the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Known for her flamboyant personality, her striking looks, and impeccable taste, Diana Vreeland changed fashion forever. Now, we can begin to assess her immense contribution in *Diana Vreeland*.

This lavishly illustrated biography includes more than 300 full-color and black and white photographs many from Vreeland's own family scrapbooks and collection which have never been seen before, of family and friends and the talented people in the fashion world whom she inspired -- designers, models, and celebrities.

Diana Vreeland herself was not beautiful. Her appearance was so striking, however, that it revealed nothing of her beginnings as an awkward and difficult child who was born in 1903 into a socially prominent New York family. How she succeeded in transforming herself and developing a brilliant career is chronicled in this fascinating biography by Eleanor Dwight, the author of the highly praised *Edith Wharton -- an Extraordinary Life*.

We see the ambitious ingénue marrying the strikingly handsome Reed Vreeland in 1924, and embarking on a six-year sojourn in England where during frequent trips to Paris she learned how to change herself into a *soignée* and sophisticated young matron.

Vreeland began her fashion career at *Harper's Bazaar* in 1936, writing a playful column entitled "Why Don't You." At the magazine Vreeland thrived, asking questions like "Why don't you rinse your blond child's hair in dead champagne to keep its gold as they do in France? Or pat her face gently with cream before she goes to bed as they do in England?"

Vreeland exerted great power over the magazine's content working with editor-in-chief Carmel Snow and legendary art director Alexey Brodovitch. When Snow left *Bazaar*, Vreeland did not get her job. The fashion world waited in anticipation; surely, Vreeland would move on to something important. In 1963 she became the editor-in-chief of *Vogue*, a phenomenally powerful position.

She transformed *Vogue* from a ladylike, conventional publication to one incredibly daring and electric. Her sensitivity to the rebellious energy of the sixties and her understanding that fashion was theatre and that she should give readers large doses of fantasy -- "what they never knew they wanted" -- enlivened *Vogue*. She sparked reader's imagination by sending leggy, vibrant models to the far corners of the earth to be photographed on the edges of cliffs or in picturesque settings on tropical islands.

In *Diana Vreeland*, we see her in the midst of varied and elite social circles -- from the British aristocracy and literati of her London days, to her glamorous New York and Southampton set, to the talented fashion world of designers, editors and photographers, to her friends in France who lived in villas and chateaus and

included the Windsors and Rothschilds, to Andy Warhol's set of young rebels in the seventies. She fostered the careers of many youthful figures whose talents she immediately spotted including Lauren Bacall, Mary McFadden, Issey Miyake, and Richard Avedon.

We see her attending Truman Capote's famous Black and White Ball to celebrate his book *In Cold Blood*, where she discovered a beautiful teenager named Penelope Tree whom she made into a famous model. We see her partying with Jack Nicolson, lunching at Warhol's Factory, and entertaining Garbo for tea. Her social calendar read like a Who's Who of the New York intelligentsia, and included lunch dates with powerful women like Katherine Graham and Suni Agnelli.

We see her enthroned in her famous red apartment, the "Garden in Hell" and strutting through *Vogue's* offices terrifying adoring protégés. We see her frustrating the staff of the Metropolitan Museum as she piped music and perfume through the ventilation system to create the exotic atmosphere for her costume shows. Along the way we meet and see the work of photographers like Louise Dahl-Wolfe, Cecil Beaton, and David Bailey, spot her encouraging designers like Oscar de la Renta, Christian Dior, and Elsa Schiaparelli and mothering models like Carmen, Lauren Hutton and Marisa Berenson.

Vreeland's profound influence left its imprint on culture and society. Ultimately, the flamboyance that made Vreeland a success would bring about her sudden downfall at *Vogue*. But, always able to reinvent herself, she took a position at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute. While there, she masterminded costume extravaganzas -- drawing on all her knowledge, enthusiasms and using her fabulous eye.

Elegant, insightful, strikingly beautiful, and filled with amusing anecdotes, *Diana Vreeland* reveals the complex, intelligent, and caring woman behind the famous persona. When Diana Vreeland became blind before her death in 1989, she said it was because she had seen so many beautiful things in her life. And when she died she became a legend.

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