

THE GODFATHER OF FASHION

INSIGHTFUL, WITTY, AND IMMACULATELY SUITED, COLIN MCDOWELL IS ENGLAND'S MOST REVERED AND REVILED FASHION CRITIC.

Colin McDowell is recognized as one of the most authoritative fashion commentators in the world. The author of sixteen books, he is Senior Fashion Writer for The Sunday Times Style section and is currently Chairman of The Costume Society of Great Britain. His book, *McDowell's Directory of Twentieth Century Fashion* has become so much the standard work on modern fashion designers that it is referred to as 'The Bible' within the fashion industry. As the *New York Times* said, "fashion addicts probably can't live one minute more without McDowell's Directory."

"I was living in Rome and acting in Italian films. The woman I was living with at the time was a designer, and one day she said to me 'You're always sketching. Why don't you copy some of these things from this [fashion] magazine?' You know how cunning women can be. I did it and the next day she said 'I've got you a job!' I think she was sick of supporting me because in acting there are long periods when you're not working and generating an income. ... At first I was fascinated by the creativity, by the intensity of it all, but after about four or five years I realized it's like anything – if you can't do it with total passion, there's no point in doing

happened to be international and ultra-modern and it was like Pearl Harbor all over again.

"I consider myself both an art historian and fashion critic. I'm very lucky to be working for a powerful newspaper because designers try to influence people; they'll say 'if you write nasty things about us then we're not going to give you our advertising'. Fortunately a newspaper like *The Sunday Times* is big enough to not be bothered by that. I've been banned by designers from attending their fashion shows more than any other fashion writer. They'll say that they hate what I write about them and I love that because that tells me that I'm doing it right. I'm not there to massage the ego of designer – I'm there to tell my readers what they need to know. They've also let me back in although I have to say that I've refused to go back to Armani.

"My own sense of fashion is very traditional. Wherever I go, everyone always comments on how they love my English tailoring and I tell them it's Ralph Lauren from head to toe. He understands men of my age and my figure – there's nothing worse than a guy over 50 trying to be trendy. Fashion and style are two very different things – fashion is doing the latest thing because it's the latest thing, while style is taking the latest thing and making it your own so that *you* are making a statement and not the

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it. I knew I'd never be a fashion creator. By then we were ready to come back to England and I met someone who asked me to write a piece about Italian fashion and that's how I became a journalist.

"*[Diana Style]* is a lovely book. I'm very happy with it. What I loved about her was this energy; when she walked into a room, it wasn't just that she was beautiful – it was a sort of purposeful energy. She was an amazing woman. We now know she had a terribly sad life, but she had a marvelous smile and a very good figure, excellent legs ... a fashion designer's dream. It took her quite a long time to gain confidence. Her last few years when she was being dressed by Gianni Versace were probably her best – she looked so soignée. And that's not something that English women naturally are. I would like people who buy the book to not just look at the pictures – as beautiful as they are – but to read what I've written because through her appearance I've tried to map out the vicissitudes of her life.

"My impression of Thailand? It's my first time here and I've only been in Bangkok for three days. I spend a lot of time just walking around. What I look for most of all is creative energy and that's created on the streets first. I've been very impressed with Siam Paragon and the Emporium because they're done on a most beautiful and luxurious scale, one that would not be possible in England – we don't have the space. I find it all very glamorous. There's also a fabulous color sense in the way ordinary people are selling things in stalls and putting colors together. ... I've started familiarizing myself with some of the young Thai designers although I find their names very difficult to pronounce! [laughs] They have what one looks for in creativity, which is courage, determination and self-belief. There's a place for Thai designers on the world stage but it's one that's got to be planned very carefully. They have to understand what the West wants in fashion so although it says 'Thai', it doesn't say 'ethnic'. A woman who buys clothes in New York, Paris, Milan or London doesn't want people to think she's Indian because she's wearing a sari. A good example from this part of the world is in the early 80s when the Japanese showed in Paris. They didn't try to do clothes the way French designers do, they gave a very strong Japanese statement which

clothes. During the 30 years I've been in this business I've never once been even vaguely tempted to put on a lady's dress, but even if I were, it would probably be Ralph Lauren.

"People really have to learn to look – most importantly at themselves. My advice to men and women would be to ALWAYS shop alone. Never bring a well-meaning friend along because they'll advise you in the wrong way. Either because they don't want you to look as good as they do, or because they really haven't got your taste. Spend as much money as you can because quality counts. This jacket I'm wearing I bought from Ralph Lauren eight years ago and I'll be wearing it for another eight years. That's perhaps another tip – don't be too fashionable unless you're young. Because when you're very young you can look like a million dollars in cheap clothes. But if you're over 35, you've got to start going for good quality materials, a clever cut – they help you as we get older. We all need help you know.

"I don't ever want to retire, I want to die working. The young are the friends of the older generation – they bring new perspectives, new ideas. You really – I hate that expression – have to go with the times. I'm very lucky in that I have a great deal of energy so I can keep up at the moment. God knows for how much longer. ... No, you may not ask how old I am – that's a state secret, you can read it in my obituary some day."

FROM DIRNDL TO DIVA

Lavishly illustrated throughout with rare and striking images, this is Colin McDowell's engaging and at times moving celebration of Princess Diana's fashion journey, drawing on exclusive interviews with her designers, advisers and confidantes.



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