



The bold and the beautiful

Singer, actress, fashion designer – the evolution of triple-threat Beyoncé Knowles has transformed her into a modern-day icon

It's a freezing cold February night in New York City but, just one look around the party at the old Tiffany and Co. building in Union Square and you can see that the guest of honour, singer, actress, and designer Beyoncé Knowles, is warming the evening up with her trademark charm and impeccable manners. It's the launch party of her first fragrance *Beyoncé Heat* and, striking a sultry pose in a form-fitting red dress by Marc Bouwer, Beyoncé is in true confident form as always.

After all, just two nights prior at the Grammys, Beyoncé won six awards (making it a total of 16 Grammy Awards thus far) and set the record for the most Grammys received by a female recording artist. With a stellar music career as an award-winning diva, a prolific acting career with roles in films such as *Cadillac Records* and *Dream Girls*, a couture fashion label with her mother, stylist Tina Knowles, a role as spokesperson for L'Oréal Cosmetics, and now her own perfume, it's an understatement to say that, at only 28, Beyoncé has boldly made her mark on more industries than most stars. ▶

IMAGE: SONY MUSIC

But despite all the awards and accolades, there is a genuine sense of grace and passion present in all that Beyoncé does. While other high-profile celebrities, with their publicly-aired personal lives and tales of prima donna behaviour are readily-available fodder for the tabloids, Beyoncé has managed to keep everyone's eyes and ears trained on her talent, in particular her bold and seductive sense of style – something that permeates her every endeavour. Amidst a grueling 110 city world tour for her most recent album *I Am...Sasha Fierce* (which spawned the infectious and provocative anthem *Single Ladies*), the sweet and sophisticated woman behind it all reveals the elements of style that transformed her from a teenage pop star to a modern day fashion icon who proudly wears her confidence, and style, on her sleeve.

FAMILY VALUES

When it comes to fashion inspiration, her roots are firmly entrenched in her family – namely her mother, someone on whom she bestows the honour of introducing her to the fashion world. “I was a tomboy as a child and refused to wear a dress or even carry a purse. But my mom convinced me to and then, when I saw tapes of a performance of Diana Ross and The Supremes, I realised I wanted to be beautiful like them, and from there everything changed.”

Beyoncé's love of Ross' stage costumes did not go unnoticed by her mother Tina, and when the time came for Beyoncé's onstage debut as the lead singer of the pop trio Destiny's Child in 1997, Tina herself designed and created each of the dramatic costumes the girls showcased on stage. Since that day, Tina has styled Beyoncé throughout her diverse career and in 2006, following constant questions from fans on where to buy Tina's handmade outfits, the mother and daughter duo decided it was time to create their own fashion label – and so was born the ready-to-wear House of Deréon collection, paying tribute to Beyoncé's grandmother, Agnès Deréon.

While the vibrant collection isn't for the stage, Beyoncé says, “just like my music is to empower women, the House of Deréon collection is for real women in real life who

want to feel like superstars, with all eyes on them when they walk into the room.” Regardless of what piece is chosen from the collection, Beyoncé insists that the most important thing in creating it, was the fit. “I've worn dresses from every price range over the years and the one detail that couture dresses have in common is that the fit is truly amazing.”

First introduced on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* in 2004, the line mixes clothing with hip-hop influences with ultra-feminine flourishes like embroidery and ruffles. “I love the clothes from the 70s, my mother's clothes, and I love the clothes

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from the 40s, my grandmother's style – it was so elegant. So we wanted to take elements from my grandmother's legacy and mix them with clothes from mine and my mother's generation,” she says.

BACK TO BASICS

Notoriously private about her personal life, in particular her relationship with husband, rapper and media mogul Jay-Z, it's not surprising that Beyoncé has two distinct personalities that emerge on and off stage. Her everyday life might be a far cry from us mere mortals, but as one of the most photographed women in the world, even on her days off Beyoncé likes to keep her style simple yet glamorous. Her dress-down day outfits consist of “a pair of sexy heels with jeans, a nice jacket, or a little waist. I like to accentuate my waist and I've found that plunging necklines are flattering on my frame. But no matter what I'm wearing,” she adds. “Smart or casual, I must always have a pair of earrings and high heels. Without earrings, I don't feel dressed.”

In addition to her earrings and stunning US\$5 million wedding ring by celebrity jewellery designer and longtime

collaborator Lorraine Schwartz, Beyoncé reveals “no matter what, I always wear this ring or necklace from Lorraine's monkey series collection because it makes me feel protected.”

MAKING FASHION FEARLESS

Although Beyoncé has several style influences, including Diana Ross for “her class and never playing it safe on stage”, Marilyn Monroe for her similar curvy silhouette, and Tina Turner for her feminine strength and sexy presence, she admits that, “I don't want to be like everybody else. I like challenging myself and setting the trend.”

Beyoncé has remained true to her commitment in setting trends when in late 2008, for the release of her album *I Am...Sasha Fierce*, she unleashed her style alter ego – the provocative and extremely sexy Sasha – by collaborating with the French couture designer Thierry Mugler. Having seen his work *Superheroes, Fashion, and Fantasy* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume Institute Gala in 2008, Beyoncé hired Thierry to create the 72-piece wardrobe for her world tour using the words ‘feminine, free, warrior, and fierce’ as inspiration. Thierry says that

“Beyoncé is a very sophisticated stage animal and she's truly instinctive. I wanted to capture the duality between being a woman and a warrior, because on stage there is Sasha Fierce and there is also Beyoncé in her truest self. Sasha is another aspect of Beyoncé's personality that comes out to play only when she is performing.”

LOYALTY AND TRUST

Renowned for her commitment and drive in her working life, loyalty is also a trait that has built Beyoncé a strong reputation within the industry. She has been working with the same team since her first foray into the spotlight, which has garnered their implicit trust. “I'm very conscious of my image. I've been working together with my team since I was 15, so every show, every shoot, every red carpet event is all something that was created by myself and them,” she says.

Her loyalty isn't limited, however, to her creative team, it also extends to other designers and over the years, she's shown her devotion to Roberto Cavalli and Armani, as well as shoe designers Giuseppe Zanotti and Christian Louboutin ▶



IMAGE TRUNK ARCHIVE



IMAGE SONY MUSIC

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by putting her polished *pièce de résistance* image together from their respective collections for numerous red carpet appearances.

But the designer for whom Beyoncé is the true muse is Lorraine Schwartz. After developing a strong bond while working together during the Destiny’s Child era, Lorraine says that Beyoncé is “an incredible and beautiful human being. She gives me so much inspiration and she ends up driving so many trends. She trusts me to come up with and create anything and she gives me so much leeway. That is rare in this business.”

It was to Lorraine that Beyoncé turned while looking for new inspiration for her *Single Ladies* video in 2008. Having explored and developed a new sound with the album *I Am... Sasha Fierce*, in which Beyoncé openly took “risks” with her music, she wanted her style to reflect this. Lorraine rose to the challenge, creating a ‘sensual yet aggressive’ look for Sasha Fierce, culminating in the creation one of Beyoncé’s now most iconic wardrobe pieces – the titanium ‘Roboglove’ from the *Single Ladies* video.

EMBRACING CULTURE

Despite a working schedule that sees Beyoncé travel from continent to continent most months, the inspiration she draws from the cultures she visits is apparent in all areas of her work. Her latest inspiration is the Middle East, drawn from watching videos of Shakira, who is of South American and Lebanese heritage. With her interest so piqued, Beyoncé has been exploring her love of the Middle East’s music and dance scene, and the two divas teamed up for the hit single *Beautiful Liar*, during which Shakira taught Beyoncé all that she knew. “She was teaching me her dance moves and all I could think was, ‘this is crazy, Shakira is teaching me how to belly dance!’ I got the best teacher, learnt about new cultures, and the energy we got from dancing together was fantastic.”

GIVING BACK

With a passion for dressing up both on and off stage, Beyoncé is adamant that while having her fun, fashion must also be used to give back. Having taken to the stage in 2008 for the charity concert Fashion Rocks, as well as donating much of her salary and face time to various charitable causes, she has recently been appointed the official face of the limited edition Fashion For Haiti T-shirt, designed by the Council of Fashion Designers of America, in support of those devastated by the Haiti earthquake. Available online and in shops now, all ►

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proceeds will be donated to the Clinton Bush Haiti Fund which offers assistance to the earthquake victim. Having already been the face of L'Oréal Cosmetics and once the face of the Emporio Armani perfume Diamonds, she is more than happy to be the face of Fashion For Haiti “to send a message of hope by raising much needed funds for the people of Haiti.”

With these fundamental style principles and an endless desire to evolve as a performer, designer and red-carpet icon, Beyoncé constantly looks ahead to where her love of fashion can, and will, take her. Recently, she teamed up with the wildly innovative musician Lady Gaga on two hugely hyped songs (Lady Gaga appeared on *I Am... Sasha Fierce* and in return Beyoncé appeared on Gaga's *The Fame Monster* for each of their respective albums). Lady Gaga, who has professed sheer admiration for Beyoncé, says that “Beyoncé is a real, real woman and a beautiful person. I had kind of lost faith in meeting artists in this business until I met her.” If imitation is the most serious form of flattery, Gaga (nicknamed Gee-yoncé on set) paid her colleague and friend the ultimate tribute by channelling Beyoncé's sleek and sexy style for the provocative *Video Phone* music video in a white strapless leotard, matching opera gloves and long flowing hair.

In the bold, beautiful, and forever changing world of fashion, Beyoncé wants nothing but to be at the top of her game. With almost 20 years in the limelight, Beyoncé is an industry stalwart, having spent the years safely building her brand and reputation as one of the most respected women in the business – a success story of extraordinary measures. “I'm highly respected, which is far more important to me than any award or hit single. I want to be iconic and have a legacy.” With this in mind, and a new album and movie on the way, as well as the continued expansion of House of Deréon, Beyoncé's legacy has a way to go yet before it's laid to bed. ■