

# BALL Gowns

## At the V&A

*Celebrating the newly renovated Fashion Galleries, the V&A opens its doors to an exhibition of beautiful and show-stopping ball gowns. From Alexander McQueen to Zandra Rhodes there is plenty to feast your eyes upon....* BY CARI JOLAOSO

Entering the Victoria & Albert Ballgowns Exhibition is like taking an acid trip through Elizabeth Taylor's wardrobe.

Everywhere you turn from the ground floor to the mezzanine, it is covered with breathtaking dresses, each one steeped in history. And if you're interested in popular culture, you may recognise one or two of them.

For example, the Alexander McQueen couture feather dress, made famous by Daphne Guinness, or Beyoncé's Ralph and Russo dress, worn for Obama's inauguration performance. Even Princess Diana's 'Elvis Dress,' designed by Catherine Walker, makes an appearance.

The exhibition serves as documentary of high society's changing tastes. It opens with the elegant, full-skirted Christian Dior dresses of the 1950s, designed for elegance and femininity, instead of practicality.

Then we move through to the 1970s, with looser fitting gowns in loud, ostentatious fabrics. These dresses, championed by Zandra Rhodes, reject the dainty princess look of bygone eras; instead keeping one foot in high fashion, and the other in Studio 54.

Then came ball gowns from the 80s, which channel the spirit of punk and the opulence of a booming economy.



This was best captured by Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood, the fashion dream team that created gowns with full skirts, loud printed fabrics, netted underskirts and deconstructed tailoring.

The 00s brought sexy back, with Matthew Williamsons' timeless summer gown, a piece that shows off the waist and shoulders, but allows freedom of movement. This style of dress has been worn by countless female celebrities, including Sienna Miller, Thandie Newton and Keira Knightly.

The most impressive part of the exhibition has to be the contemporary dresses. These include the aforementioned Alexander McQueen dress, the Nicholas Oakwell 'galaxy' gown, and best of all Gareth Pugh's silver leather dress, made especially for the exhibition.

These gowns show how celebrity culture has infiltrated the fashion industry, and how savvy celebrities now choose dresses that will garner media coverage, as oppose to admiration.

If you like glamour, high fashion, history and culture (and who doesn't) you'll find the V&A Ball gowns Exhibition a delight.

It's a walk through a debutante's wanderland, and an opportunity to see how the other half dress.

### VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM

Cromwell Road  
London  
London SW7 2RL

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