

St Augustine's Centre, Halifax**English for Life in the UK****Episode 33 - Fashion and Design in the UK**

September 2020

Mark Hello and welcome to the podcast **English for Life in the UK**. This is episode 33 of the podcast, intended for intermediate-level learners of English. It's produced by a group of volunteer teachers from the St Augustine's Centre, in Halifax, Yorkshire, where we provide a range of support and advice to those in need, and particularly to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

However this podcast is for anyone who wants to improve their English and, at the same time, to learn more about life in this country. After this episode, we're going to take a short break of two or three weeks, and then we will be re-launching the podcast in a slightly different format. Until then, if you would like to tell us your views on the podcast, to help with the next stage, we have a survey available on our website :

www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

That's spelt: s-t-a-u-g-u-s-t-i-n-e-s-c-e-n-t-r-e-h-a-l-l-f-a-x

You'll find a link to the survey on that website. That is also where you can find the transcripts for all our episodes and links to all our episodes. The transcript for this one will be available in a few days' time. You can also contact us at our email address, which is englishforlifeintheUK@gmail.com and we would be interested to hear a bit about yourself and also what you think of the podcast and how it could be improved.

Today's episode is brought to you by Christine, Sheena and Mark and the focus is on fashion and design. In the transcript of this episode we will include some images, and links to images, to help to illustrate the things we're talking about. We hope you find it useful.

(Music)*(2 minutes 49 seconds)*

Christine This week's topic is fashion and design in the UK and Mark, I think you're going to start by telling us what it tells us in the official study guide for *the Citizenship Test*.¹

Mark Yes - thanks Christine. There's a short section on fashion and design in the UK and it starts with fashion, so maybe we should just explain: fashion is really about the style of clothes, but it's not just clothes - it's also things like hairstyle, shoes, jewellery, makeup - those things all become part of fashion. Fashion is usually associated with a particular period of time, so, for example, you can talk about the "fashion of the 1960's" or "this year's fashion" and, in the *Official Guide*, it mentions three different

¹ life in the United Kingdom: Official Study Guide, tso

famous UK fashion designers, and I think Sheena is going to tell us a bit about each one of these. The ones they mention are: Mary Quant, Alexander McQueen and Vivienne Westwood. So, Sheena, what can you tell us about those three people?

Sheena I think I will start with Mary Quant² who I think is the most iconic³ fashion designer of the 1960's - or the "Swinging Sixties", as people often refer to it, now. Along with a

French designer, she was responsible for maybe one of the - again - most iconic pieces of clothing, in the 1960's, which was the mini-skirt, which was a very short skirt: above the knee, often just 10 centimetres, or 4 inches, below a person's bottom. Made to wear with the fashion boots called "go-go boots", often the people at the time, often would wear false eyelashes and, like Mary Quant, would have Vidal Sassoon 5-point geometric hair styles and ...



Mary Quant. Source: wikimedia

Mark What does that mean, Sheena? Describe that hairstyle.

Sheena It would be a full fringe, coming into two points in front of the person's ears, showing the ears, and then two points at the back, but I don't know where the fifth point is! I'm sure listeners can look up this hair style and then, the other thing I would say that was very fashionable in the Sixties, and I'm afraid I've been talking about female fashion here - because Mary Quant was more associated with female fashion - is wearing PVC, which was a sort of plastic vinyl material that was often in very bold colours - very bright or very deep colours - often raincoats, shoes, handbags, things like that.

(6:16)

Christine I remember.

Mark So do I, but of course, I did not wear a mini-skirt but I did wear flared trousers, so they are trousers where, at the bottom - at your ankles - they became very, very wide.

Sheena That's right Mark - and how wide were you flares? You could have 22" (inches) I seem to remember, or 24".

Mark I don't think mine were that wide. (Laughter)

Sheena Very wide, isn't it?

Mark So, tell us about Alexander McQueen.

² website:

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/exhibitions/mary-quant>

³ if something is 'iconic' it is widely known, influential and celebrated

Sheena He came a lot later - in between, was probably Vivienne Westwood. But I'll talk about Alexander McQueen, since you've asked. I would say he is one of my favourite designers, mainly because anything I have seen of his fashion shows were so dramatic - totally outrageous - and, I'm sure, made headlines in every newspaper, the next day. He was from himself, from a very working-class background and he'd learnt the art of tailoring by working on Savile Row⁴, making ... learning the trade from people who had been making high quality suits for decades, so he learnt how to drape material, cut material, and create seams, so his clothes were, as well as so they were beautifully tailored⁵. He's well-known for his precise tailoring, and then, and also,



Alexander McQueen design. Source: wikimedia

the delicate beauty of his materials, but on top of this, the themes of his shows were the thing that got him a lot of attention and to start with, he didn't even want to sell the clothes, he was just making a name for himself. So his shows One of the most famous one(s) - was called "The Highland Rape" which was very political and it was about British - the British in Scotland, centuries ago, and one of his other shows was about "aliens", where all the hairstyles, the special effects, the make-up, were what made that a really dramatic show. If anyone wants to know more about him - there's a film about his life - I think it's just called "McQueen" - and it's really excellent for understanding the pressures of the business, and sadly, in 2010, I think it was, when he was only 40, he took his own life and I think that was because of the great pressure that he was under. His name lived on, however, because his assistant, Sarah Burton,

⁴ a street in central London, famous for high quality, formal men's clothing

⁵ a tailor is someone who makes, repairs or alters clothes, if clothes are described as 'tailored' then they are precisely made to exact measurements and shapes

designed Kate Middleton's⁶ wedding dress, so his inspiration and his influence, was still around.

(9:27)

Mark Thank you - so what about Vivienne Westwood? You mentioned her ...

Sheena OK - Vivienne Westwood was like '70s⁷, '80s and she was known for "punk"⁸. She and Malcolm McLaren - who was the manager of a punk group called the Sex Pistols - designed their own clothing range and sold it in their own shop in London. It was mainly, I think, using materials such as leather and tartan and often held together with safety pins, and ripped jeans, and ripped clothing, was popular, I think, with punk clothing, at the time. But she's still ..., she's still designing now. She's been designing



Vivienne Westwood. Source: Wikimedia and Flickr

for 5 decades - she is a 'Dame'⁹ - so she has been recognised for her achievements and now her clothing has - at the moment, I think, reflects her concerns about climate change and, in the past, she's also had clothing ranges supporting CND¹⁰ - so very political, very political designer.

Mark Thanks Sheena. Christine - I think you're going to tell us a bit about the fashion industry generally.

⁶ Kate Middleton, the Duchess of Cambridge, is married to Prince William who is likely to become King of the UK in the future

⁷ 70s is a shortened versions of 1970s

⁸ punk was a rebellious fashion, often untidy and aggressive, intended to shock

⁹ a status conferred on women by the Queen, for recognition of their contribution to public life through their work.

¹⁰ CND = Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

Christine Well what I was going to say is - it's a very important part of the British economy. It and it has been for centuries. In medieval times, the main export from this country was wool. So, fashion and textiles have been central to the UK throughout time. I think - well a few years' ago - there were £26 billion in the fashion industry, in this country - that's twenty-six thousand million pounds. And 800,000 jobs - people directly employed in the fashion industry - so it's often considered to be: "Oh, that's just a bit of fun", but it is quite central to our economy and, as well as the design and the production of clothes, there's quite a lot of fashion education in this country. People do travel to study fashion in this country. It's the UK's largest creative industry.

Mark Interesting. Sheena - I think you said there were a couple of other fashion designers that you thought our listeners might be interested in.

(12:27)

Sheena Yes - there's two there are ... maybe associated with celebrities - Stella McCartney, who was the daughter of Paul McCartney (one of the Beatles¹¹). She is a fashion designer and I think at first, she suffered from the fact that her name was well-known,

but now she's really successful. She must have been, maybe twenty years now, I should imagine, she's been designing clothes. She's very successful; a lot of her clothes are now worn by celebrities - such as Madonna and Gwyneth Paltrow - and perhaps one of the most important things about her, is that she refuses to use fur or leather, because like her parents, she's always been a strict vegetarian.



Stella McCartney. Source: wikimedia

Then the other person that I'm particularly interested in is somebody called Christopher Bailey, who again, came from a very ordinary background: his mother was a window dresser from Marks and Spencer's¹², and his father was a carpenter, and he lived in Sowerby Bridge - and went to school in Sowerby Bridge - and then he went to Batley Art

College, and then, in 2014, he worked his way up at Burberry, which is a very high-end fashion brand in the UK, that has been around for a very long time, but under his chairmanship or as CEO¹³, he transformed the brand and it became one of the most successful.... you know, a really successful ..., a real(ly) success story and I just

¹¹ Famous, worldwide, pop music group from the 1960s

¹² Well-established British chain of clothing shops.

¹³ CEO = Chief Executive Officer

thought the fact that he lived in Halifax throughout this time, was very interesting to me.

Mark Yeah ... we should say to all our listeners, that all those places that Sheena mentioned they are all local to us here, where we're recording this. And Sheena - I think you said there was a Turkish designer as well that you knew a bit about.

Sheena



I don't know a lot about this designer: I've just heard of him, myself, but apparently he is very up and coming and very popular at the moment. He's claimed to be a British designer. He's called Erdem - E-R-D-E-M - and he was born in Canada and has a Turkish background, but is being promoted as a British designer, but at the moment, he is, apparently he creates beautiful fabrics and his clothes are said to have an old-world elegance but they ..., at the moment, being currently worn by young women like Meghan Markle and Kiera Knightly. So, a very popular contemporary designer.

(16:20)

Erdem. Source: wikimedia

Mark That's great - thank you. So the other part of this section, in the *Official Handbook*, is about design, more generally. We've been talking there about fashion design, but design is really about the process of planning and making things, and particularly objects such as furniture, ceramics, that's pottery, interior design - that means the design of the inside of houses, craftsmanship in general, the making of things, is again something that the UK has been famous for over the years, and still is today.

And again, there are some people mentioned in the *Official Guide*. One of them is Thomas Chippendale. Now, he was designing in the eighteenth century - and he designed furniture - wooden furniture of very high quality, which is still sought after these days - you pay a lot of money for - in an auction¹⁴ - for a Chippendale table or piece of furniture. So that's Thomas Chippendale.



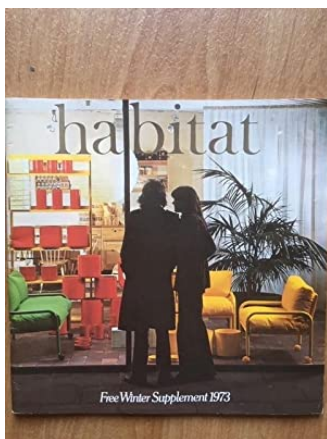
Chippendale High Chest. Source: Flickr

The second one is Clarice Cliff - now she is a ceramics designer and, later in this episode, I'm going to interview Janice - who happens to be my wife - but is particularly interested in the design work of Clarice Cliff, so you'll hear a bit more about that, later in this episode.

¹⁴ an auction is where goods are sold by people bidding amounts of money and the highest bid gets the item

And then, the third one that's mentioned in the book, is Sir Terence Conran and I think, Christine, you're going

Christine Yes, I mean the first sad - he died, just last acknowledgement of country, over the last, school in 1950 and but pretty soon he designed and made known for other the primary one. In shop called Habitat



to tell us a little bit about him. thing I think I'll say is - it's quite week, so there's been a lot of his contribution to design, in this what? - seven decades¹⁵. He left started working for an architect, opened a furniture workshop and his own furniture. He's also things, but the furniture I think is particular, in 1964, he opened a and that's certainly how I know

him, because the Habitat brand, the Habitat shops - there were some in the big cities, in this country. They produced elegant but very .. furniture with very clean lines - you might almost say, utilitarian - they mirrored their purpose: nothing fancy about it, but just elegant. And - I mean, these days - or later in the twentieth century, that look became very popular with the Swedish brand, called IKEA, opening stores all over Europe and indeed, all over the world. But Terence Conran was making furniture like that, even furniture that came in flat packs, some twenty years before IKEA. He's also ... he's contributed in lots of other ways. In 1989, he founded the Design Museum in London and that is, certainly, normally, a big centre, where anybody who's interested in design can go and look at aspects in Design.

Mark Thank you very much, Christine. OK, so, Janice - I know that Clarice Cliff¹⁶ is one of your favourite designers - tell us a little bit about her.

(19:30)

Janice Well, she was a fascinating woman: born at the end of the 19th century, in Staffordshire, which was famous for its pottery factories and she became a world renowned designer of pottery. She was a very poor girl, to start with, and came from a poor working-class family, one of eight children; left school at 13 and went to work in one of the pottery factories, where she learnt how to paint freehand, on the clay pots. She was obviously quite talented and she was noted - noticed, rather - by the factory owners. Because she started work in the factories just as the First World War was starting, there were lots of vacancies in the factories, because the men had gone off to fight, and she was promoted quite quickly and quite quickly became one of the top designers.

¹⁵ this is spoken form used when you are not sure about something, you could say 'it's about 7 decades (that's 70 years), or I think it's 7 decades or, in this case, Christine says 'it's what?..7 decades'

¹⁶ website:

<https://claricecliff.com/museum>



Clarice Cliff pottery. Source: wikimedia

Mark So tell us a bit about what kind of things she designed and what style she used.

Janice Well she started off by painting clay figures - that was her main interest - and just decorating the pots, as she was told to decorate them, in the factory, but when she started to have her own ideas and started to experiment, she used very bright colours which were quite unusual, at the time, and she became very interested in the *Art Deco* movement.

Mark So - what do we mean by *Art Deco*?

Janice It was a fashion of design that became very popular in the 1920s and 1930s and it wasn't just pottery - it was painting, furniture, fabric - all sorts of things. Often very angular and very - sometimes you'd get lots of black and white things, but you'd also get things with really bright colours, and that's what interested Clarice. In the mid-1920s, she started developing her own lines of pottery and she used *Art Deco* shapes - quite a lot of angular, interesting-looking tea pots and jugs and plates, that were unusual, but became incredibly popular; very very bright colours, fabulous patterns, and that just carried on through the 1920s and '30s.

Mark And I understand that, today, they're very highly collectible. Is that right?

Janice Absolutely - she died in 1972, just as there was a reviving interest in the whole *Art Deco* movement and a lot of her designs were collected and looked at again. They'd gone out of fashion in the 1940's and '50's, and by the 1970's and '80's, bits of pottery that were really selling very cheaply, when they were first made, were becoming real collector's items, and now it's very, very difficult to buy a Clarice Cliff piece of pottery cheaply - they're all very, very expensive.

Mark That's great - thank you very much - that's really interesting.

(Music)

Language Support (23:33)

Mark This is the part of the podcast where we choose some aspect of language used in this episode and talk about it in a bit more detail. In this episode, because we were talking about fashion and design, we used a lot of words about ... to describe materials: the things that things are made of. So, in this episode you heard us talk about plastic,

vinyl, which is a type of plastic, wood, wool, fur, leather, pottery, ceramics - those are all materials - and there are lots of others that we didn't use in this episode - for example, paper or glass, or cotton or nylon.

So cotton, nylon, wool are all fabrics or textiles, that are used to make clothes and other things, and then you've got lots of metals: brass or iron or steel or aluminium - and then you've got concrete and brick - so lots of words that describe different materials.

Now, those words can be used as nouns - so we can say:

"she makes ceramics" - or - "this shoe is made of leather" - or - "he likes to work in wood" -

so using them as nouns, or you can use them as adjectives. In most cases, the noun and the adjective are exactly the same form. So you can talk about:

"a glass table" - or - "a pottery mug" or "a paper cup",

but there are a few where the **adjectival** form of the word changes. So, for example, you would **not** talk about "a wood table" - you would say "a wooden table" and likewise "wool" , as an adjective, would normally be "woollen" - so "this is a woollen jumper".

So I hope that's been helpful - I am sure you can look up those words to make sure you understand what they are in your own native language, but it's useful to know quite a few of those materials, to be able to talk about things.

I hope that's been helpful. A reminder again that you can find [the] transcript to this episode, which will also include some illustrations and links on our website :

www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

and we will be back with you, after a break - a short break, two or three weeks - with a new episode. In the meantime, take care of yourselves and goodbye.

Ends - (27:43)