
Claire McCardell, Designer, Is Dead

Claire McCardell, designer of clothes to give women a look of casual comfort, died of cancer yesterday in New York Hospital. Her age was 52.

If anyone could claim the title of "All-American designer for the All-American girl," it would be Claire McCardell. But she was a shy woman, and the honors that were heaped on her during her lifetime always came as a surprise.

The prizes were unexpected because she created only clothes she needed herself. "It just turns out," she once said, "that other people need them, too."

Her fashions were simple, functional, classic and typically American. As soon as she was able to design as she wished, she stopped borrowing ideas from Paris; she believed that French clothes were imprac-

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71° sun and fun at Miami Beach's NAUTILUS HOTEL, N.Y. OIL: JU 6-1188.—ADVE.

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tical, too complicated and made for rich, formal women.

Miss McCardell was born May 24, 1905, in Frederick, Md. She was the only girl of four children, which may have accounted for her tomboyish tendencies and her lifelong love of sports.

At the age of 18 she entered Hood College in Frederick. Miss McCardell left after her sophomore year because she disliked most subjects except sewing, went to New York and enrolled at the Parsons School of Design. She hoped to become a fashion illustrator.

Studied in Paris

In 1927 Miss McCardell went to what was then the source of all fashion. She spent that year in Paris, continuing her studies at the Parsons branch school in the Place des Vosges. She completed her studies the next year at Parsons in New York.

Unable to find work as a fashion illustrator, she took a job painting rosebuds on lampshades. This was followed by brief, unhappy tries at modeling, working as a sewing-machine operator, sketching at a fashionable dress shop and designing for a knit-goods concern. She was discharged from this last position after eight months because her experience was considered inadequate.

Miss McCardell's luck took a turn late in 1930, when she became assistant designer to Robert Turk. When his dress house was disbanded in 1932, she went with him to Townley Frocks, Inc. From then on until her death, except for a short time of designing for Hattie Carnegie in 1939, Claire McCardell and Townley Frocks were an inseparable combination.

Mr. Turk drowned a few months after he had gone to Townley. The fashion collection he had been preparing was incomplete, and Miss McCardell was told to finish it in time for the season's showing. She did, and the collection was a success.

The list of McCardell "firsts" in fashion is a long one. Her monastic dress of 1938, with its loose, free-flowing lines belted at the waist, swept the country and resulted in a flood of cheaper copies. She was the first to use blue-jean stitching, trouser pleats and pockets in women's clothes. In 1942, when



Claire McCardell

most maids had decamped to war factories, she introduced the "popover."

The popover was a wrap-around coverall in denim that sold for \$6.95. Women could do their own housework in it and still look smart. More than 75,000 of these were sold the first season. There was a variation of the popover in every succeeding McCardell collection.

Ballet Slippers for Models

Necessity mothered almost all of Miss McCardell's inventions. In 1942, unable to get proper shoes for her showroom models, she put them into fabric ballet slippers. The fad caught on and their popularity has lasted until the present.

Long before Dior's slope-shouldered "New Look" came along, Miss McCardell ripped the football-player shoulder pads out of her own dresses. She felt that they were stiff, uncomfortable and unfeminine.

She broke away from Parisian style dictates in 1940, and from then on never visited a French fashion collection. "I don't want French influences confusing me," she explained.

Miss McCardell believed all clothes should be functional and free of fuss. "I do not like glitter," she once said. "I like comfort in the rain, in the sun, comfort for active sports, comfort for sitting still and look-

ing pretty. Clothes should be useful."

Her clothes were considered timeless. This was proved in 1953 when the Frank Peris Gallery of Beverly Hills, Calif., held a "retrospective" of twenty years of Claire McCardell fashions. Each one of the dresses shown could have been worn at the time, and even today, without looking out of style.

The designer was a tall, blonde, lanky woman with sparkling blue eyes, a breezy yet modest manner and a ready laugh. Her posture consisted of a permanent slouch at the shoulders and a slump at the waistline. She taught all of her models to walk this way in her showroom. The "McCardell slouch," she once explained, was typically American: "The American woman has a posture all her own; she is neither erect nor queenly."

Won Many Honors

The honors Miss McCardell received for her casual designs included the Mademoiselle Merit Award (1943), the Coty American Fashion Critics Award (1944), Best Sportswear Designer Award (1946), Neiman-Marcus Award (1948) and the Women's National Press Club Award, presented to her by President Harry S. Truman in 1950.

Starting in 1954, the designer gave an annual Claire McCardell Gold Thimble Award to an outstanding student at the Parsons School. She remained a devoted alumna and part-time consultant at the school until her death. In 1956, her book, "What Shall I Wear?" was published by Simon & Schuster.

Miss McCardell was a member of the advisory committee of the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Couture Group of the New York Dress Institute. She also was an active worker for the Brooklyn Museum's fashion departments.

In private life, Miss McCardell was the wife of Irving Drought Harris, an architect. They had an apartment at 151 East Seventy-ninth Street, a farm at Frenchtown, N. J., and a summer home at Fishers Island, N. Y. The couple was married in 1943.

She is survived also by her mother, Mrs. Eleanor Clingen McCardell; three brothers, Robert, John Malcolm and A. Leroy McCardell Jr., and two stepchildren.