

# A fearless fashion icon

By Gail Goldberg

## Elizabeth Taylor could rock a dress and diamonds like no other



The beauty. The perfection. God's most supreme workmanship.

Voila, Elizabeth Taylor personified.

Yes, these phrases sum up the otherworldly beauty of the Hollywood legend. But truth is Taylor uttered these very words herself (to Barbara Walters), referring to the sparkling diamonds for which she famously had a lifelong love affair.

Just like those beloved gemstones, Taylor's brilliance was always impossible to deny, hide, diminish or cover up. Of course, this owes to her extraordinary and unique physical features: mesmerizing violet eyes, thick raven hair and, in her younger days, a killer body with a teensy waist, curvy hips and seriously ample bosom.

Along with her DNA (thank you, Mr. and

Mrs. Taylor), the London-born beauty had a passion for glamorous clothes with a dramatic flair. This, and her aforementioned bling obsession, made Taylor a bona fide fashion icon for most of her 79 years.

Unlike many of today's fashionista superstars who have stylists on their payrolls and avoiding fashion blunders on their minds, Taylor was bold and fearless in her clothing choices. Makeup, hair, accessories and jewels to the max were the only rules she followed. ("Enough is never enough," she said a couple of years ago in an interview, regarding her personal style.)

Indeed, excess, glitz and glamour epitomized Taylor's style throughout her life. During her heyday, a quintessential "Liz look" would consist of a flowy yet curve-enhancing dress with a plunging neckline by Halston or Valentino and a dramatic up-do, fantastic hat or headscarf. Those dazzling gems – diamonds, emeralds, rubies, you name it – were always the ice-ing on the cake.

Taylor's celluloid style, however, was much simpler, especially in the early days of her career. But thanks to the sheer force of her face and figure, even uncomplicated frocks took on a powerful and sexy magnificence. Bottom line: it's impossible to separate the actress's film and personal style when discussing her role as an inimitable style icon.

The seminal on-screen fashion moments (circa mid '40s to late '60s) that exemplify Taylor's magical ability to transform minimalist to major (while sparking real-life trends) center around the SWD, or simple white dress. In *BUTterfield 8*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *A Place in the Sun*, Taylor had take-your-breath-away turns wearing, respectively, a basic white slip, an uncomplicated white chiffon dress by Helen





Rose (aka “the cat dress”) and a white Edith Head-designed strapless party dress.

As Taylor’s career moved on, dramatic roles and equally dramatic costumes caused another kind of style worship. When she appears as the title character in *Cleopatra* (1963) donning that gold headdress – eyes kohl-rimmed to perfection – it’s an immediate and indelible fashion moment. Although the elaborate headdress is the most spectacular piece in the Oscar-winning film, it stars a bevy of glamorous “Egyptian meets mod ‘60s” costumes, as well as exotic makeup and dazzling jewels to match.

Irene Sharaff was the wardrobe designer for *Cleopatra* as well as for the Oscar-winning *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966). Talk about polar opposites: the role of Martha is the antithesis of the stunning Egyptian pharaoh: she was a sloppy, hard-edged alcoholic whose clothes conveyed as much. And Taylor relished every moment in her skin.

Not surprisingly, Sharaff became one of the movie star’s



favorite personal designers and was cited by Taylor, along with Valentino, Halston, Versace, Head and Rose, “as the real geniuses” behind her fabulousness.

As the decades passed, Taylor stayed true to her bold self. She rocked miniskirts (and a OMFG headdress or two) in the ‘70s, poufy everything in the ‘80s and killer caftans in the ‘90s and beyond. In 1997, Taylor was awarded the CFDA Lifetime of Glamour Award.

### Gem obsession

Taylor died in March, and it’s said her collection of diamonds, emeralds, sapphires, rubies and other fine gemstones is valued at \$150 million. The majority of her museum-worthy collection was amassed over years, primarily gifts from her seven husbands, all of whom tried to outdo the others – something Taylor happily encouraged.

Awards for the most amazing pieces go to, perhaps, the two true loves of her life: Mike Todd (husband number three) who bestowed on her a 29-karat diamond ring and Richard Burton (husband four and five – they were divorced in between), who gave her a 33-karat Krupp diamond ring and a 70-karat diamond necklace, which is now known as the Taylor-Burton diamond.

While rumor has it Christie’s will be auctioning off Taylor’s lot, chances are pretty good that her four children have already called dibs on their favorite pieces.