

Shakespeare in Studs

By Christina Binkley



Melinda Sue Gordon

The costumes of 'The Tempest,' featuring Helen Mirren, make heavy use of zippers; courtly looks with biker boots.

Movies in Fashion

'The Tempest' could spark a run on zipper-adorned styles. Below, five films that had an impact on the fashion world.

Breakfast at Tiffany's,' 1961



Everett Collection

Audrey Hepburn in 'Breakfast at Tiffany's'

The birth of the Little Black Dress. Famed costume designer Edith Head and couturier Hubert de Givenchy introduced an effortless brand of chic that sent women swooning for pearls and ballet flats for generations.

In 1977, "Annie Hall" sent women digging for treasure in their boyfriends' closets. "Out of Africa" in 1985 helped fuel a khaki craze. "The Tempest," a new screen adaptation of the Shakespeare play, could mean that an unlikely look will be parading down fashion runways next year: Elizabethan punk.

Miles of zippers course through the jackets in this version of Shakespeare's mythical drama, directed by Julie Taymor and opening Dec. 10. Silver-metal zippers were folded, or accordion pleated, to create Elizabethan-ruff collars. The romantic Prince Ferdinand, played by Reeve Carney, accents his courtly look with motorcycle boots, and metal studs adorn many players' doublets.

Sandy Powell, the film's costume designer, says the zippers weren't just a stab at being avant-garde: They were a way to keep the film's costs down. Actual Elizabethan court costumes would have been embroidered with fancy gold braid.

The film had a limited costume budget, a relatively small \$200,000. Ms. Powell sewed zippers on costumes herself during filming on the rocky Hawaiian island of Lanai. "I don't always do that," she says, "for anyone who's reading this and wants to hire me."

Actor David Strathairn, who played King Alonso, spent two days attaching hundreds of metal studs to his own costumes. Ms. Powell and several seamstresses were holed up around a large cutting table in a house in Lanai when the actor wandered in and offered to help. "We had so little time and budget that the only way we achieved it all was to accept all offers of help, Ms. Powell said recently, after a day filming Martin Scorsese's "Hugo Cabret" in London.

Love Story,' 1970



Everett Collection

Ali MacGraw and Ryan O'Neal in 'Love Story'

Women everywhere aimed to emulate Ali MacGraw's bohemian but preppy style, complete with woolen coats and little knit hats. Ryan O'Neal's button-downs remained popular casualwear on college campuses for 20 years.

'Saturday Night Fever,' 1977



Paramount/ Everett Collection

John Travolta in 'Saturday Night Fever'

A love letter to white suits, wide collars and polyester. Tacky or not, the disco look came to identify the era. Costume designer Patrizia von Brandenstein would go on to win an art-direction Oscar for "Amadeus."

Ms. Powell, 50, resides in London. She has dressed ghouls, royals and gangsters in films including 1994's "Interview with the Vampire," "The Departed," "Shutter Island" and "Gangs of New York."

She's the go-to costume designer for Mr. Scorsese, whom she describes as a "shoe man." "He always gets in a good shot of the shoes," she says. After filming "The Aviator", she had the tailor who made Leonardo DiCaprio's suits for the film make Mr. Scorsese a couple of suits.

Though she studied design at St. Martins college in London, Ms. Powell says she was never interested in commercial fashion design. "It's so much more interesting," she says, "to design for real people's shapes."

She won Academy Awards for her costumes for "Shakespeare in Love" and "The Aviator," yet when she returned to the podium to accept her third Oscar for "The Young Victoria" this year, she seemed chagrined by the award's continual emphasis on period pieces. She dedicated the award "to the costume designers that don't do movies about dead monarchs or glittery musicals."

"Contemporary films are incredibly difficult to do," she says now. But "it's either the stuff that's most extravagant or experimental, or historical period that wins the awards."

"The Tempest" costumes fall into the realm of experimental—such stuff as couture fashion shows are made of. The play, said to be the last that the Bard wrote alone, takes place in a magical world in which a sorcerer can stir up a tempest with a wand.

'Annie Hall,' 1977



Mary Evans//Everett Collection
Diane Keaton in 'Annie Hall'

Diane Keaton's eclectic ensembles featuring wide ties, bowler hats and waistcoat vests charmed a generation. Ruth Morley, the film's costume designer, also created memorable looks for "Taxi Driver" and "Kramer vs. Kramer."

'Out of Africa,' 1985



MCA/Universal/ Everett Collection
Meryl Streep and Robert Redford in 'Out of Africa'

Thanks to Meryl Streep and Robert Redford, khakis never looked so good. Costume designer Milena Canonero, whose other credits include "A Clockwork Orange" and "Marie Antoinette," was nominated for an Oscar.

In this rendition, Ms. Taymor, who shot to household-name fame with "The Lion King" on Broadway, has morphed Prospero into Helen Mirren's Prospera: She is a reluctant earth mama, storming about in layers of shredded cotton.

Ms. Powell says she initially found Ms. Taymor, a costume designer herself, to be a daunting boss. In an early scene in the film, Prospera stands on a rocky precipice in a jagged cape that flaps in a gale. Ms. Taymor's script called for the cape to resemble the volcanic shards of Lanai.

"I challenged her, because as a designer myself, I know how costumes shape a character," says Ms. Taymor during a break in rehearsals for her upcoming Broadway show, "Spider-Man Turn Off The Dark."

Ms. Powell considered fiber optics and glass for the look, but rejected them as impractical before settling on making the cape with 3,000 pieces of vacuum-formed plastic, painted and sewn together. "It weighed a ton," she says. "Poor Helen had to stand there with her arms up while she was yelling into the storm." Three crew members yanked strings attached to the cape's hem to achieve the flapping effect.

Ms. Taymor also asked for the dark and metallic court wear that defines the look of the film. She says she is pleased with Ms. Powell's results, noting the rock 'n' roll quality of a zippered coat worn by Prince Ferdinand.

"The Rolling Stones would wear a jacket like that," she says.

