

# Introduction

**Audrey Hepburn** came to the attention of most Americans in September 1953, when she got above-the-title billing as Princess Ann in *Roman Holiday*—capturing the heart of her costar, Gregory Peck, as well as a generation of moviegoers who wondered: Who *is* that young woman? Her name, we soon learned, was Audrey Kathleen Hepburn-Ruston, she was the daughter of a baroness, and within weeks of the film's release her gamine style, her singular off-screen fashion sense, and even her haircut were copied by a generation of women throughout the world.

At a time when the prevailing notion of the acceptable way for women to dress was highly sexual, with a very obvious silhouette of large breasts, a tiny waist beneath a full skirt, and mincing heels, by her example, Audrey offered another way for women to dress, behave, aspire to, and even be.

And almost fifty-five years since we first saw *Roman Holiday*, Audrey is still showing us how it's done. As a style icon, her influence is unrivaled. In 2006, *New Woman* magazine voted her the Most Beautiful Woman of All Time. On Seventh Avenue, in Hollywood, in the halls of *Vogue*, *People* magazine, or *InStyle*, to describe something (or someone) as “very Audrey” is shorthand for the absolute height of chic.

Today, fashion designers are the new rock stars. On television, shows like *America's Next Top Model* and *Project Runway* attempt to demystify the fashion world, and not an awards show goes by without stars being asked: “What are you wearing?”

But Audrey was—and still is—the first. Every fall or spring, it seems, another designer mimics the clean lines of her crisp white shirt, the little black dress, or beautifully fitted Givenchy-esque suit. Often without realizing it, the best dressed among us are still reveling in the lessons Audrey taught.

When you see someone wearing oversized sunglasses with an evening gown, that's not original—that's Audrey. Ballet flats outside of a dance studio? Audrey was the first. The straight line of a black sweater and fitted black trousers that every fashion editor in the world seems to favor? Way before Prada had fashionistas dressing like they were en route to a beatnik funeral, Audrey was appearing that way—quite radically for the time—in the mid 1950s.

But the way she dressed was almost the least of what makes Audrey cool. Decorator Jeffrey Bilhuber, who has worked with some of the most stylish women of our time, believes that Audrey is still so compelling today because of who she was: “Audrey never systematically schemed to become a star—she had stardom within her . . . it didn't have to be created or manufactured. It was always there. She would have been as admirable a math teacher as she would have been a movie star, because she was predestined for greatness—she was what she was.”

Her cultural influence is still so iconic that in September 2006, Gap unveiled the Audrey Hepburn™ Pant to Middle America (much

to the chagrin of many of her fans—“nothing less than a travesty,” said one fashion blogger—and her more proper Hollywood friends) with a television ad that featured a computer-generated Hepburn dancing to the very non-Audrey AC/DC’s “Back in Black.” The fact that the campaign was okayed by her sons Sean Ferrer and Luca Dotti, that Gap made a generous donation to the Audrey Hepburn Children’s Fund, mollified few people. “They also made her look much thinner than she was in real life,” complained a close friend of Audrey’s.

As to whether Audrey would or would not have sold herself out like that, the jury is still undecided—had her first marriage to Mel Ferrer not imploded, he might have tried to broker some kind of a deal. But those who knew Audrey knew (as Cary Grant did) that “in spite of her fragile appearance, she’s like steel,” and doubt she ever would have allowed anything so crassly commercial to occur under her name or image. On the other hand, they know she would have done practically anything to help promote the good work of UNICEF.

Audrey was the first celebrity of her stature to use her fame to help others and, beyond that, to help those whom most people did not care about, or barely thought of. Especially today, when the prevailing notion of celebrity is pure ego satisfaction—“I am famous, therefore I am [and therefore: you owe me]”—and the bar for being considered famous is sinking lower and lower (appearing on a reality television show, being picked up for DUI, having a blog), Audrey could be considered quite radical because she used her fame for something other than her own personal gain.

As Robert Wolders, her companion and spouse in everything but name and her partner during the happiest years of her life, observed, “Audrey sensed at a very early age that fame or stardom doesn’t mean that much. So she made a conscious decision within herself—she was very realistic, and aware that she had to do something with this notoriety, this attention she was getting. Something to help others, if she could. And this was something that she was born with.”

Today, Audrey's sentiment is increasingly prevalent among the more enlightened celebrities. As Matt Damon recently observed of fame, "I think it's incumbent on us to do as much good as you can within the sphere of influence that you have. Otherwise, it's just a waste of resources."

But before George Clooney and Angelina Jolie, even before Oprah Winfrey was doing so, Audrey and Rob were flying in little planes to some of the most desolate places on earth—Ethiopia, El Salvador and Nicaragua, Sudan, Bangladesh, and finally, Somalia, the one that broke her heart.

Another more interesting question might be: Why, more than fifty years after *Roman Holiday* was released, is Audrey Hepburn still being held up as a style (and in our opinion life) icon? Since we first met Audrey in 1953, and after her untimely death in 1993, she has rarely been off the cultural radar. Robert Wolders thinks the answer is simple (although mildly depressing in the society we find ourselves in today): No one has taken her place.

Oh sure, there have been a few pretenders to the throne (Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Grace Kelly, Sofia Coppola), but really, has anyone, could anyone, replace Audrey? We're going to go out on a limb here and say no. But rather than get depressed over this (and the fact that we shall never, in this lifetime and quite possibly the next, be able to eat all the carbs we want and never gain weight), let's study Audrey's life lessons and learn what we can from her.



As a woman of her influence and stature, Audrey has had dozens of books written about her. Although her face and the on-screen characters she created are famous, there is still much we don't know about Audrey.

Yes, she had a twenty-inch waist that an early Hollywood PR man insisted on encircling in a dog collar as a publicity stunt and having a photographer take a picture of. Hubert de Givenchy remained her

friend for life, and was the executor of her estate. Although renowned for her mesmerizing eyes, she did not wear makeup at home. She knew how to iron. She was handy and could fix things. She did not like to drive. Her two divorces almost killed her. She had trouble gaining weight and enjoyed eating bowls of pasta.

And in case you're wondering—she was not an American, and not even distantly related to Katharine Hepburn.

She smoked two—and occasionally three—packs of cigarettes a day her entire adult life, yet had such personal self-discipline that she could eat a square of dark baking chocolate and stop at that. Winner of two Oscars (one posthumously), she was nominated four times and was one of the few people to win an Oscar, a Tony, an Emmy, and a Grammy. But Audrey's real dream was to be a wife and mother. "Even when I was a little girl," she said, "what I wanted most was to have a child. That was always the real me. The movies were fairy tales."

In spite of her memorable, beautiful visage, Audrey did not consider herself attractive. Rob Wolders thought "she was like a child that refused to believe how good she looked." But her friend Audrey Wilder said she must have had some sense of her influence on modern twentieth- and now twenty-first-century fashion. "When she saw so many copies of herself walking down the street, how could she not?" she observed rightly.

But let's not kid ourselves, there are ways that AH was like us, and ways that she was *way* better than we are. Yes, she was born with great beauty, an enviable bone structure, and a manner that made practically everyone she met fall instantly in love with her. She also rarely exercised, ate whatever she wanted, enjoyed a Scotch in the evening, and remained an enviable 110 pounds her entire adult life.

(How did she do it? Don't worry, we'll get to that.)

On the other hand—and this is where the real lessons begin for us—her personal life was not the cakewalk she wanted the world to believe it was. In reality, her experience was full of tremendous heartbreak. ("Until Rob, she just didn't have much luck in the man department, did

she?” said Dominick Dunne, a friend.) There were miscarriages, personal betrayals, loneliness, and unfaithful husbands. Still she kept going.

And truth be told, she was not St. Audrey (a term she detested), nor the simple, ethereal princess that Gregory Peck fell in love with.



Life, wrote the seventeenth-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, is “nasty, brutish, and short.” Wow. And this was before the invention of CNN, BlackBerry addiction, and Internet dating. Today, politicians (granted, not the most stylish group at any level) are at one another’s throats. The stock market is up, or it is down. Etiquette (basic or otherwise) is at an all-time low. Even the people we traditionally look to for fun-loving advice—the Hollywood starlet or her East Coast counterpart, the socialite—are too busy doing a perp walk, checking into Promises, popping Adderall, or neglecting to wear lingerie in public to be of much help to us.

Who, then, can we turn to?

In the beginning of the twenty-first century (much as we did for most of the twentieth century), we look to Miss Audrey for advice. For consolation. For encouragement. For answering the inevitable question: What the heck am I going to wear today?

What follows, then, in one handy volume, is the full Audrey Primer. From beginner lessons (Iron your shirt! Stand up straight!) through the advanced (getting out of that marriage without losing your mind), *What Would Audrey Do?* will show you how to navigate both the shoals and the high points of your life.

WWAD? is not another Hepburn biography, but a primer in what we can learn—today—from Audrey’s life lessons. There is Audrey’s beauty and style, obviously, but also how to run your life, how to rebound after a brutal divorce. Two brutal divorces. We also explore her interior life, her sensitivity—this is what made her a great actress, after all, but also made her intensely vulnerable to the slights of the world, and Hollywood is a notoriously tough town. How did she keep going?

“Audrey was such a regular, down to earth person, that when I read some of what people write about her, I don’t recognize her,” says Rob Wolders. With close to ten years of research, interviews with Audrey’s friends, family, and those she loved, as well as access to new sources of information, *WWAD?* is the ultimate Audrey go-to guide.

For those of you who don’t know your history—and really, what Americans do?—we’ve got enough biographical information here to satisfy the most devoted Audrey fan. Audrey’s place in pop culture? Her role as a cultural icon? How she influences designers and style icons today? All covered. Dating tips from Audrey? Got it. How to get some Audrey Style for yourself? We’ve got it right here. In short, how to make your way through the vagaries of your own life by using AH’s experiences as an example. So instead of merely considering Audrey as a style icon (a simple enough thing), we are going to study the underpinnings of her life as philosophical guideposts for decisions we make in our own lives.

Because face it, while we might not have Audrey’s enviable figure (heck, we know we don’t), there are still so many lessons we can learn from her. How to overcome adversity. How to create the life that *you* want. How to be a fashion icon in your own corner of the world. (And forget what Hollywood tells you—size has almost nothing to do with it.)

Think of this book as Audrey 2.0, because like Audrey herself, *WWAD?* is a Zen koan with a soupçon of style thrown in. And because frankly, while she played both a princess and a Givenchy-clad call girl with equal aplomb on-screen, the real Audrey was smarter, tougher (at times), funnier, stronger willed, more vulnerable, earthier, and far more worldly than the public either knew or imagined.

And someday—whether you are a precocious eighth grader, a sorority gal, out in the world and working, dating three guys at once, a stay-at-home mom, or an Oscar-winning actress with a few style issues of your own—you will thank us for lifting the curtain on All Things Audrey. Because really, don’t you think we could all use some Audrey in our lives, right now?