

Yves Saint Laurent: fashion as freedom and revolution

Maria Cattini | 12/08/2025 | PEOPLE

Few designers have reshaped the cultural and social fabric of **fashion** as profoundly as **Yves Saint Laurent**. More than a couturier, he was a **revolutionary**—an artist who understood that clothing could be a vehicle for **freedom, self-expression**, and even **political commentary**.

Breaking Boundaries from the Start

When **Saint Laurent** took the reins at Dior in 1957, he was just 21. His early collections already challenged conventions: softer lines, a new ease, and a willingness to draw from **street style** and **youth culture**—radical for the world of haute couture.

In 1961, he founded his own **maison** with Pierre Bergé, creating a label that would **push boundaries** for decades. He wasn't simply making clothes; he was proposing a **new way of living in fashion**.

The Tuxedo for Women: A Manifesto in Black

Perhaps nothing symbolizes **Yves Saint Laurent's impact** better than **Le Smoking**, introduced in 1966. At a time when women wearing trousers in public could be refused entry to restaurants, the tuxedo was more than a garment—it was a **social statement**.

It gave women **authority, allure**, and **confidence** long reserved for men, without stripping away **femininity**. His genius lay in fusing **masculine tailoring** with **feminine elegance**, proving that **power dressing** could be profoundly stylish.

Art, Culture, and Subversion

Saint Laurent drew inspiration from **art** and **global cultures** with fearless **eclecticism**. His **Mondrian dresses** of 1965 turned **modernist painting** into **wearable art**.

Collections also incorporated **Russian folklore, African patterns, Moroccan caftans**, and the **bohemian streets of Paris** ☐☐. He was one of the first designers to cast **models of diverse ethnic backgrounds**, quietly challenging the **Eurocentric norms** of fashion in the 1960s and 70s.

Ready-to-Wear as Liberation ☐☐

In 1966, **Saint Laurent** launched **Rive Gauche**, a **ready-to-wear** line that **democratized high fashion**. This move scandalized some in the couture establishment but opened the doors of **luxury fashion** to a younger, broader clientele.

The boutiques became **cultural hubs**—places where women could buy cutting-edge fashion **without an appointment or society pedigree**.

Legacy of a Revolutionary ☐☐

Yves Saint Laurent's influence extends far beyond his lifetime. The language of modern **fashion—gender-fluid silhouettes, art-inspired collections, and cultural crossover**—owes much to his vision.

He believed **fashion should empower, not constrain**, and his legacy of **style, liberation, and identity** remains more relevant than ever.

“What’s important in fashion is to make clothes that people will wear. Fashion that is not worn is not fashion.” - **Yves Saint Laurent**

For **YSL**, clothing was never just about style. It was about **identity** ☐☐ **freedom** ☐☐, and the quiet—or sometimes bold—**power of change** ✨.