ForeWord Reviews

CULTURE

Dressing Marilyn: How a Hollywood Icon Was Styled by William Travilla
Andrew Hansford
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It's difficult to find a new way to examine an iconic figure, especially one as popular as Marilyn Monroe, but *Dressing Marilyn*, by Andrew Hansford, manages to do precisely that. In cataloging the costumes created for Monroe by designer William Travilla, Dressing Marilyn brings together rare photographs, sketches, and interviews in a book that will be of interest not only to tried-and-true fans but to fashion aficionados as well.

Monroe's iconic clothing is such that just reading Hansford's table of contents—which includes the chapters "The Red Dress," "The Gold Dress," "The Pink Dress," and "The White Dress"—is enough to conjure the garments to which he's referring; their images immediately pop to mind.

The narrative is twofold: there's the story of Marilyn's clothes and the story of her relationship with Travilla, the man who made them. It's a fascinating new angle on Monroe, who has always been more famous for the body her clothes were (barely) covering than for her fashion sense. Despite their iconicity, her clothes haven't been associated with a particular designer, a circumstance that comes in great contrast to many of the stars of the time. Audrey Hepburn and Hubert Givenchy, Grace Kelly and Edith Head, and even Jacqueline Kennedy and Oleg Cassini all famously had long-term collaborations. *Dressing Marilyn* goes a long way toward filling that gap in Monroe's history—detailing the friendship that arose between William Travilla and Monroe during the decade that he dressed her.

Perhaps the most fascinating element of *Dressing Marilyn* is the attention to the details of the clothes themselves, thus the need for entire chapters on single dresses. The chapter on the "The Pink Dress" from *Gentleman Prefer Blondes*, for instance, includes images of a fabric swatch, an early sketch featuring black gloves, a later sketch with the pink gloves that were ultimately used, and—most uniquely—close-ups on the details of the dress itself, including the bow, the belt, and the back closure. An entire half-page is dedicated to a photograph illustrating the invisible wire that held the enormous bow in place.

It's this attention to detail that sets *Dressing Marilyn* apart from the scores of photography books about her and makes it a must read, especially for the style savvy.

Oline Eaton