



The Essence of Style: How the French Invented High Fashion, Fine Food, Chic Cafes, Style, Sophistication, and Glamour

Joan DeJean

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What makes fashionistas willing to pay a small fortune for a particular designer accessory -- a luxe handbag, for example? Why is it that people all over the world share the conviction that a special occasion only becomes really special when a champagne cork pops -- and even more special when that cork comes from a bottle of Dom Pérignon? Why are diamonds the status symbol gemstone, instantly signifying wealth, power, and even emotional commitment?

One of the foremost authorities on seventeenth-century French culture provides the answer to these and other fascinating questions in her account of how, at one glittering moment in history, the French under Louis XIV set the standards of sophistication, style, and glamour that still rule our lives today.

Joan DeJean explains how a handsome and charismatic young king with a great sense of style and an even greater sense of history decided to make both himself and his country legendary. When the reign of Louis XIV began, his nation had no particular association with elegance, yet by its end, the French had become accepted all over the world as the arbiters in matters of taste and style and had established a dominance in the luxury trade that continues to this day. DeJean takes us back to the birth of haute cuisine, the first appearance of celebrity hairdressers, chic cafes, nightlife, and fashion in elegant dress that extended well beyond the limited confines of court circles. And Paris was the magical center -- the destination of travelers all across Europe.

As the author observes, without the Sun King's program for redefining France as the land of luxury and glamour, there might never have been a Stork Club, a Bergdorf Goodman, a Chez Panisse, or a Cristophe of Beverly Hills -- and President Clinton would never have dreamed of holding Air Force One on the tarmac of LAX for an hour while Cristophe worked his styling genius on the president's hair.

Written with wit, dash, and élan by an author who knows this astonishing true story better than virtually anyone, *The Essence of Style* will delight fans of history and everybody who wonders about the elusive definition of good taste.

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