

**Biography - Vivienne Westwood**

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(Figure 1)

## I. Introduction

Dame Vivienne Isabel Westwood (8 April 1941 – 29 December 2022) (Figure 1) was an English fashion designer and businesswoman responsible for bringing modern punk and new wave fashions into the mainstream. In 2022, Sky Arts ranked her the 4th most influential artist in Britain of the last 50 years (*Vivienne Westwood* 2024).

Of course, painting such an unconventional life in a single portrait is not easy. A woman with a strong character, Vivienne Westwood was determined not to be stopped by the establishment, the mainstream or the logic of power. She hated mediocrity and knew how to speak of freedom through crinolines, tartans and a restless punk aesthetic (Pasquinelli, 2022).

## II. Early life

Vivienne Westwood was born as Vivienne Isabel Swire on April 8, 1941, in Glossop, Derbyshire. Growing up during the Second World War, she experienced a childhood marked by resource scarcity, sparking her early interest in making small, handcrafted items.



Post-war, her family managed a sub post office in Tintwistle (Frankel, 1999). Reflecting on her early encounters with the arts, she admitted in an interview, "I did not learn about art museums until I was 17 years old on the recommendation of my art teacher, Mr. Bell. Art books and theater were foreign to me." Nonetheless, she modestly describes herself as "a child who attracted others to her. I was adventurous, passionate, and intellectually curious" (Frankel, 1999). Perhaps the seed for Westwood's future flamboyant career was sown by her grandfather, Ernest Swire, a bootmaker. A closer look at the family lineage reveals a tradition of crafting shoes, boots, and clogs, passed down through generations since the mid-19th century (Barratt, 2007).

In 1958, Westwood's family uprooted to Harrow, Greater London, when the British capital was in its swinging splendor, Carnaby Street was teeming with colorful dresses, and the streets were overrun with Mary Quant's miniskirts. This was the atmosphere she was looking for (Pasquinelli, 2022). At school, Westwood always stood out, showcasing a penchant for style. She ingeniously tailored her school uniform to mirror the fashionable pencil skirt and meticulously crafted many of her own garments, including a finely tailored 'New Look' dress (Vivienne Westwood · V&A).



### III. Growth and education

Upon departing grammar school at 16, Westwood briefly pursued studies at the University of Westminster (formerly Harrow Art College), focusing on fashion and silversmithing (Vivienne Westwood · V&A). However, after just one term, she departed, voicing, "I couldn't fathom how a working-class girl like me could carve a path in the art world" (though in 2015, she notably chose to stage her London Fashion Week catwalk show at the University of Westminster).

By the early 1960s, following a brief factory stint and work at a teacher-training college, she embarked on a career as a primary school teacher. During her time in Harrow, she crossed paths with Derek Westwood, an apprentice at the Hoover factory. They exchanged vows on July 21, 1962, and it seemed her life was mapped out for a while. In 1963, she welcomed her first son, Benjamin. Simultaneously, she began crafting her own jewelry, which she sold at a stall on Portobello Road (Frankel, 1999). However, her first marriage dissolved after merely three years (Vivienne Westwood 2021). Reflecting on this period, she remarked, "We were living the American dream, but my reality ended in the confines of the kitchen," expressing her departure from Derek as a necessity to fulfill her potential (Pasquinelli, 2022).

After her marriage dissolution, Vivienne met Malcolm McLaren in 1965 (Figure 2), an art student who would later become the manager of the Sex Pistols. With McLaren, Westwood welcomed a second son, Joseph. Through McLaren, she ventured into jewelry making on the side, exploring newfound creative freedoms and recognizing the profound impact of art on the political realm (Vivienne Westwood 2021). Hungry for knowledge, she absorbed everything McLaren offered; their bond was rooted in creativity rather than sentimentality (Pasquinelli, 2022). Their collaborative partnership, spanning from 1970 to 1983, played a pivotal role in

birthing the Punk movement. Reflecting on their dynamic, Vivienne reminisced, "I sensed a myriad of doors waiting to be opened, and he possessed the keys to unlock them all. Moreover, his political fervor resonated with me, urging me to align myself" (Vivienne Westwood · V&A).



(Figure 2)

In 1971, Vivienne's husband, Malcolm McLaren, founded the iconic Sex Pistols. Westwood contributed to the band by penning lyrics and designing clothes alongside McLaren. They aimed to create something immediate, an angry voice that would challenge the system. Notably, she crafted the famed ripped T-shirt emblazoned with the word "Destroy," worn by Sex Pistols' Johnny Rotten, a garment that garnered widespread attention (now showcased at the Victoria & Albert Museum) (Pasquinelli, 2022).

#### IV. Career development

In the 1970s, Vivienne Westwood's moment arrived. Amidst a sea of dress pins and coupe sauvage-esque hair, she began to leave her mark on the mainstream, though she never quite fit into its mold. Reflecting on the era, she remarked, "We weren't truly rebelling against the system because punk had become part of it. They had appropriated it."



(Figure 3)



(Figure 4)

As the punk movement faded and disbandment of the Sex Pistols, Westwood sought new avenues. In 1975, she and McLaren rebranded their shop (at 430 Kings Road in London) "Let It Rock" as "Sex" (Figure 3), adorned with the declaration 'Craft must have clothes but Truth loves to go naked' above the door. The interior brimmed with provocative graffiti, rubber curtains, and a selection of sex and fetish wear. Westwood found a peculiar allure in these taboo garments, stating, 'People regarded the clothes I wore as shocking, but I wore them because I felt like a princess from another world.' And Marco Pirroni, of Adam and the Ants, reminisced, 'The nation was awash in beige and cream Bri-Nylon, and their store was an oasis. It took considerable liberalism and courage to strut in rubber down the streets. If you shopped there, nowhere else would suffice.' Viewing Westwood's clothes as 'a valiant effort to challenge the older generation,' her rebellious fashion was inevitably absorbed and defanged by the mainstream. In her early



forties, she redirected her focus towards subverting the Establishment from within (Vivienne Westwood · V&A).

The early 1980s signaled a pivotal shift in McLaren and Westwood's trajectory. While McLaren's passion lay in music, Westwood, for the first time, envisioned herself as a fashion designer. Yet, she sought a new direction. The shop underwent another transformation, culminating in its ultimate incarnation as World's End, which is still the name that's in use today (Figure 4). Concurrently, Westwood and McLaren unveiled their inaugural collaborative catwalk show in 1981, dubbed the Pirate collection (Figure 5). Staged at Olympia in spring 1981, the attire harked back to the golden era of piracy, replete with highwaymen, dandies, and buccaneers. Mirroring the ethos of Punk, the garments were gender-neutral, swiftly penetrating the mainstream (Vivienne Westwood · V&A).

Subsequently, in March 1982, McLaren and Westwood inaugurated a second shop christened "Nostalgia of Mud," its facade adorned with a world map. A V&A curator hailed the establishment as 'astounding, utterly unparalleled in the retail realm.' However, in the early half of the 1980s, Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren parted ways. Reflecting on this period, Westwood candidly expressed, "I had grown disinterested in Malcolm; he could no longer offer me anything." (Vivienne Westwood · V&A).



(Figure 5)



(Figure 6)

By 1984, Westwood had relocated to Italy with her new business partner, Carlo d'Amario (still serving as the managing director of her company) (Vivienne Westwood · V&A). In the same year, Vivienne was invited to show her Spring-Summer 1984 'Hypnos' collection in Tokyo at Hanae Mori's 'Best of Five' global fashion awards with Calvin Klein, Claude Montana, and Gianfranco Ferré.

And immersed in Italian culture, she unveiled the "mini-crini" collection at a 1985 show in New York. For the next two decades she created collections that took inspiration from classical sources, notably the paintings of Jean-Honoré Fragonard, François Boucher, and Thomas Gainsborough, as well as historical British dress, including the 19th-century bustle, which Westwood incorporated under elaborate knitwear dresses and tartan miniskirts (Ray, 2024).

However, her brand encountered financial turmoil. Amidst precarious finances, Westwood sought income where she could, teaching fashion at the Academy of Applied Arts in Vienna (1989-91) and the Hochschule der Künste in Berlin (from 1993). In the Vienna lecture hall, she found love with one of her students, Andreas Kronthaler. They wed in 1993, with Kronthaler assuming the role of the company's partner and creative director (Pasquinelli, 2022).

Since then, Westwood has tirelessly expanded her eponymous fashion empire, operated numerous boutiques and curating a lineup that includes two menswear and three womenswear collections annually, alongside bridal attire, shoes, hosiery, eyewear, scarves, ties, knitwear, cosmetics, and perfumes.

Ultimately, Westwood passed away on December 29, 2022, at the age of 81.

## V. Achievements and honors



Vivienne Westwood is often hailed as the creator of punk, affectionately dubbed the Mother of Punk. This title stems from her collaboration with her former partner, Malcolm McLaren, in the mid-1970s. They played a pivotal role in shaping the visual aesthetic of the punk movement, albeit their work often captured and commercialized the movement's energy and rebellious spirit (Price, 2024).

Following her spectacular debut on King's Road in London's Chelsea district, Westwood relocated her operations to Paris in the early Eighties, where she became the first designer to introduce British street culture to the international catwalk. Notably, Westwood was bestowed with an OBE (Figure 7)- a memorable moment ensued as she famously twirled knicker less in a full tartan skirt outside Buckingham Palace after receiving the honor - solidifying her status as a



national treasure (Frankel, 1999). Subsequently, she was elevated to Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE) in 2006 (Ray, 2024).



(Figure 7)

Furthermore, the exhibition 'Vivienne Westwood: The Collection of Romilly McAlpine' graced the Museum of London from April to June 2000. On April 1, 2004, a retrospective dedicated to her illustrious career opened at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. "Vivienne Westwood: 34 Years in Fashion" marked the largest exhibition the museum had ever curated for a British designer. This landmark event was followed by the Moët & Chandon Fashion Tribute, honoring Vivienne Westwood as the first fashion designer to receive a solo exhibition at the V&A, a testament to her unparalleled achievements and leadership in the industry.

Westwood has rightfully earned her place as one of the twentieth century's most influential British fashion designers. In June 2003, she was honored with the UK Fashion Export Award for Design. Additionally, she received the Outstanding Achievement in Fashion Design award at the 2017 British Fashion Awards and the prestigious Prince Philip Designers Prize in 2010. While she is often credited with pioneering "underwear as outerwear," reviving the corset, and introducing the "mini-crini," her earliest and most profound association remains with the subcultural fashion and youth movement known as punk (Price, 2024).

## **VI. Personal life**

Vivienne Westwood's family life and personal relationships have always been a subject of great interest. Her parents played significant roles in her early life, with her father working as a storekeeper in an aircraft factory and her mother in the local cotton mills.

Despite her strong and independent public persona, her private life has been just as colorful. Westwood had three major relationships in her life, each significantly shaping her personal and professional paths.

Westwood's first husband was Derek Westwood. They met at Westwood's age of 18, when Westwood went dancing alone. At first no one wanted to dance with her until Derek invited him. Derek was two years older than Westwood, and at the time he was working as an apprentice at the famous Hoover's factory in West London, but he had been working hard to fulfill his dream of becoming a Westwood describes him as a very nice man, lovely and warm, kind and funny and sweet. Because of their attraction and the many things they had in common, they married in 1962 (Westwood & Kelly, 2014). However, the marriage ended after only a few years. Reflecting on this period, she remarked, "We were living the American dream, but my reality ended in the confines of the kitchen," expressing her departure from Derek as a necessity to fulfill her potential (Pasquinelli, 2022).

And during this marriage, in 1963, her first son, Benjamin Westwood (Figure 7 right), was born. He grew up with his half-brother Joe Corre in Clapham, London. At the age of 28, Ben began working as a color photographer before following in his mother's footsteps and carving out a career in the fashion industry. He launched his first collection at London Fashion Week in

2012, according to the Evening Standard. He said he was inspired by tribal culture, red Indians and pirates. "We used to do that a lot when we were kids. My mother always loved movies about Red Indians," he told the publication at the time (Barratt, 2007).

Her second marriage was to Malcolm McLaren, a pivotal figure in her life and career. Together, they were instrumental in shaping the punk movement. McLaren, born in Stoke Newington in 1946, brought a unique blend of fashion sensibility and musical innovation that complemented Westwood's designs, fueling their creative partnership. Reflecting on their dynamic, Vivienne reminisced, "I sensed a myriad of doors waiting to be opened, and he possessed the keys to unlock them all. Moreover, his political fervor resonated with me, urging me to align myself" (Vivienne Westwood · V&A). Rejecting mainstream hippie dress, McLaren wore Teddy Boy clothes and collected rock 'n' roll, "jungle beats that threatened white civilization. "In 1971, McLaren opened a store called Let It Rock, which sold "whorehouse creeper" shoes and coats he designed and had sewn by an East End tailor. Mohair sweaters and drainpipe pants were made by local tailors. Over the next decade, the store changed identities frequently and was styled by McLaren. (Vivienne Westwood - V&A). Despite the ups and downs of their relationship, their shared creations and philosophies made them legendary partners.

Meanwhile, during the relationship they had a son named Joseph Corr  (Figure 7 left), who was also an accomplished entrepreneur and designer, founding his own fashion label and achieving success in the industry. He co-owns a men's clothing store called A Child of the Jago with his half-brother Ben. Then later, in 1994, he ran the underwear brand Agent Provocateur (Frankel, 1999) with his wife Serena Reese. In 2007, he was awarded the MBE, but declined the honor in protest against Prime Minister Tony Blair's actions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Now, in



2010, he left his job at Agent Provocateur to start working as brand director for the British cosmetics company Illamasqua (Barratt, 2007). Although their relationship was once complicated, the bond between mother and son has since become stronger.



(Figure 7)

Westwood's third relationship was with Andreas Kronthaler, a member of her design team, a marriage that continues to this day. During this relationship, Westwood described herself as an "unbelievably happy person" and described the relationship as one of passion and creativity. Kronthaler worked alongside Westwood in design and played an important role in the running of the brand (Frankel, 1999).

## **VII. Inheritance**

Vivienne Westwood's life has had an indelible and profound impact on future generations, the fashion industry and society. She was not only an outstanding designer, but also a revolutionary and environmentalist, whose personal values and ideas inspired future generations to go beyond tradition and pursue change and innovation.

First and foremost, Vivienne Westwood's impact on the fashion industry is obvious. She has shaped the fashion industry for generations with her bold designs and anti-conformist attitude. This noblewoman of British fashion has always been provocative. In the 1970s, when Westwood began selling her eccentric bondage gear, big platform shoes and slogan T-shirts on London's King's Road - the epicenter of luxury - she made new wave and punk mainstream. She changed people's idea of aesthetics. Her mania for punk was a messianic passion, and she wondered if people could somehow plug in to the system. By the early 1980s, she was experimenting with pinstripe silhouettes and tartan, among other things, and debuted her signature corset, inspired by the silhouettes of 18th-century courtesans (Adams, 2012). Her work is more than just clothing, it is an expression of ideas and a challenge to social perceptions. She encourages designers to be uninhibited, to dare to break with tradition, to pursue individuality and innovation, a spirit that has influenced the entire fashion industry and inspired countless others who have come after her.

At the same time, she is one of the pioneers of environmentalism in the fashion industry. She emphasized sustainability and respect for the environment and incorporated these concepts into her designs and brand operations. Her commitment to political and environmental advocacy remained steadfast in the 2000s. Distinguished designer Vivienne Westwood works alongside

activist Vivienne Westwood. She works with The Made in Kenya, launched in 2010, as a partnership with the United Nations, supporting the Ethical Fashion Initiative and Artisan Fashion. Her efforts have led to the fashion industry becoming more aware of environmental issues and have pushed many brands and designers to move towards more environmentally friendly and sustainable production methods, which has far-reaching implications for the growth and future of the industry as a whole. Outside of fashion, Westwood has supported causes such as animal rights, working with PETA to spearhead the promotion of plant-based nutrition while shedding light on the environmental impact of the meat industry.



(Figure 9)

Additionally, she is a staunch opponent of consumerism and works with numerous non-profit organizations. To promote lifestyles that minimize the environmental impact, in 2010 Westwood left an indelible mark on [climaterevolution.co.uk](http://climaterevolution.co.uk), a platform that urges people to take action against the ecological crisis. Here, her "Save the World" (Figure 9) manifesto became a clear blueprint for preserving the planet, underscoring the designer's desire to lead a transgressive

revolution, and in 2012, she donated one million pounds to the charity Cool Earth. Westwood asserted in 2013, "The reality of man-made climate change is widely recognized." People from all walks of life are reassessing their values and behaviors. This momentum fuels the revolution. The struggle is no longer between class or rich and poor, but between ignorance and environmental awareness.

## VIII. Conclusion



Whether one calls her a "punk priestess" or a "crazed activist fighting consumerism and capitalism," one would be hard pressed to describe the life of Dame Vivienne Westwood as boring. She was a flag-bearer in the fashion world, representing fearless innovation and anti-conformity. Vivienne Westwood never stopped at exploring herself and controlling the limitations of her career. If she wants to change something, she doesn't hesitate to do so; likewise, if she wants to reject an idea or a system, she doesn't hesitate to destroy it, because she believes that behind destruction there is always a greater rebirth.

The spirit of Vivienne Westwood was a combination of counterculture and contradiction; she was a genius at subverting convention. While the fashion world remembers her, it also marvels at her eternal fighting spirit and bravery. In a career spanning more than half a century,

she captivated countless creatives with her unique vision and ever-changing ideas, and she never forgot to remain true to herself, always maintaining her own style and uniqueness.

Fashion superstars such as Donatella Versace and Riccardo Tisci have taken to social media to pay tribute to the punk queen for inspiring them to become eclectic designers. Stella McCartney also paid tribute to the late Vivienne Westwood. She recalled photographer Juergen Teller's birthday dinner when Mrs. Westwood meticulously analyzed the corner of their tablecloth then created a small pattern, effortlessly designing an item with zero waste." She's a genius," McCartney wrote.

In terms of influence on the future of fashion and design, Vivienne Westwood's legacy will live on. Her irreverent spirit and challenge to convention will continue to inspire a new generation of designers. Her eco-friendly philosophy and pursuit of sustainable fashion will also serve as an important guide for the future of design, encouraging people to pursue a more eco-friendly and sustainable path in their fashion creations. At the same time, her pursuit of freedom and creativity will always be an inspiration to designers, leading the fashion industry towards a more diverse and open future.

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