

In the closet with

Barbara Hulanicki

The creator of Biba led a colourful life in the Sixties, but now she's back to black Words and styling by Tricia Welch

Polish-born Barbara, 78, founded fashion label Biba in 1964 with her late husband Stephen Fitz-Simon. Since leaving the company in the 70s, she has continued to work as a clothes and interior designer, and has launched the online boutique Iconclub. She lives in Miami and London.

How would you describe your style? Black, by necessity. I'd be distracted if I wore colour. With an all-black wardrobe, everything matches and life is simpler.

Beige has sneaked into your wardrobe...

Yes, it's my one recent concession. Someone once said that if I started wearing beige, they'd know I had dementia. I hope they're wrong!

With Biba, you introduced a whole new colour palette. What was the thinking behind that? After the war everyone looked so dreary, but bright colours don't work in Britain because of the weather and the light. The answer was dirty plums, purples and burnt oranges – they look vibrant but no one was using them.

Which shapes suit you best? Narrow arms and skinny legs. The middle section can be wider but the overall silhouette is slim. If I'm wearing a jacket and trousers, it's important to have a feminine element – say the neckline – to soften the effect.

What is your go-to outfit? In Miami I live in scruffy T-shirts, leggings and flip-flops. In London I'm smarter – still a T-shirt and leggings but I'll wear a tailored jacket as well.

What is your fashion weakness? Leggings. I collect them from all over – H&M, Zara, Helmut Lang – but I'm still looking for the perfect pair. They need to be longer, to go over a shoe with a heel or platform. I'm planning to make my own.

What excites you about your new venture? The Iconclub collection is made in Britain, which is very important to me.

What is your favourite high-street store? Topshop. I've designed for them and they keep it local wherever possible, while turning collections round really fast. That's how I've always worked.

You also design for George at Asda... Yes, why not? My philosophy has always been that fashion should be fun, affordable and accessible.

Who is your favourite designer? Helmut Lang. His sizes are amazing – you can buy one up or one down and it will still fit.

Are you a fan of vintage? I like looking but I'd never wear it. There's too much energy from the people who wore it before. It freaks me out.

Have you kept many of your original Biba pieces? Just one

“My philosophy has always been that fashion should be fun, affordable and accessible”



Barbara wears a Robbi & Nikki jacket, an Iconclub T-shirt and H&M leggings. Below: A selection from her own label



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