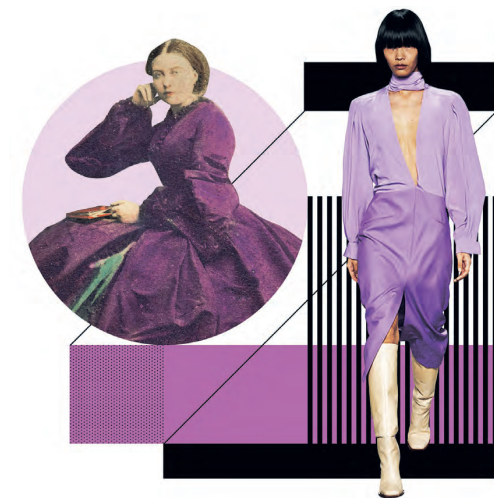


## STYLE &amp; FASHION



FASHION WITH A PAST / NANCY MACDONELL



**IN THE SPRING** of 1856, an 18-year-old English chemistry student named William Henry Perkin spent the Easter break pottering about in his home laboratory. His plan was to extract a synthetic version of the malaria drug quinine from a sludgy byproduct of gas lighting known as coal tar. As it turned out, malaria sufferers had to wait until 1944 for synthetic quinine. Instead, Perkins stumbled into fashion history by inadvertently creating the first aniline dye, a deep mauve that was soon dubbed Perkin's purple.

Ever since, purple has drifted in and out of fashion, rarely a headliner but often a compelling supporting player. It has recently found its way into multiple designers' collections, including those of Tom Ford, Sally LaPointe, Cushnie and, of course, Anna Sui, the industry's unofficial purple standard-bearer.

As an 8-year-old, Ms. Sui saw the Jerry Lewis film "Cinderella," in which a princess character travels in a lavender Rolls-

Royce. Obsession ensued. "I just thought it was way cooler than pink," she said of this formative experience. Her enthusiasm for purple deepened when, as a teenager, she discovered the London brand Biba, where designer Barbara Hulanicki had a penchant for bruiselike shades of plum and mulberry. Now Ms. Sui has all her boutiques painted the same shade of purple (Pantone 2655) and includes it in almost all her collections. "For me, it's a neutral," she said.

Not everyone feels that way. "I've had people say it doesn't sell, it makes you look weird, people don't want it," said British designer Christopher Kane. None of which prevented him from peppering purple throughout his resort collection, which includes a ruffled, leopard-print magenta minidress.

A cheerful provocateur ("I'm always drawn to what people don't like"), Mr. Kane is at his best when he's subverting norms. His magenta dress takes purple's orig-

inal association with royalty and power and spikes it with a self-assured, girlish sexuality.

The identification of purple with royalty, both secular and ecclesiastical, goes back to ancient times, when dyeing cloth this color required monumental effort. A colorfast tint known as Tyrian purple was obtained from the

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glandular secretions—or, as the ancient scholar Isidore of Seville more poetically put it, the tears—of sea snails. Tens of thousands of these snails and a lot of unpleasant work—the snails had to decompose before the dye was extracted, which caused an almighty stench—were needed to create a small amount of dye, which made its price astronomical. In Latin,

**LAVENDER LADIES** From left: Victoria, Empress of Germany, in 1861; a tougher look from the Givenchy spring 2020 collection.

the dye was known as purpura, from which the English word purple is derived. Roman sumptuary laws decreed that senators might wear a white toga edged with Tyrian purple; victorious generals were allowed a rather ritzier solid purple toga with a gold stripe, which gives you an idea of the relative status of politicians and military men in Ancient Rome.

Although the manufacture of purple fabrics had become more practical by Perkin's time, it still relied on natural substances, which can result in fleeting dyes. Perkin's discovery promised a purple that was both colorfast and cheap. Moreover, he had the good fortune to have his eureka moment at a time when purple was at the height of fashion. Its status as an ultra-modish shade was assured when it was taken up by the Empress Eugénie of France, Europe's leading fashion arbiter. Queen Victoria gave it her approval by wearing purple to her daughter Victoria's wedding. Mauve mania swept the world, an early example of a truly global fashion trend.

Today, purple is most often associated with creativity, as embodied by His Purpleness, Prince, whose recently published autobiography sports a title printed in purple ink. Leatrice Eiseman, the executive director of the Pantone Color Institute, which chose ultraviolet as 2018's color of the year, characterized purple as complex and multidimensional. "It has a uniqueness about it. Red is dynamic and exciting, while blue is calming and quieting. Out of that you get new colors with nuances and suggestive undertones. Creatives pick up on that," she said.

In singling out ultraviolet, a bluish purple, Ms. Eiseman and her team considered numerous factors, including the trend for consuming antioxidant-rich purple foods and drinks. I would add the Harry Potter franchise (the films are full of purple), which millennials grew up immersed in. And unicorns, which are associated with an array of merchandise not seen since the 1970s (another purple decade), and are often shown in shimmery shades of heliotrope. Purple is not always part of the unicorn-scape, but it embodies the same ideals of whimsical mysticism. So ubiquitous are unicorns they've become part of the language of commerce—think of unicorn investors.

With a narrative that includes weeping snails, precocious chemists and diminutive rock stars, it would be tempting to describe purple as a uniquely fantastical color. But purple, prove, unlike purple clothing, is to be avoided.



## No Shrinking Violet

Pieces from the current collections that might seduce even the most purple-phobic fashionistas



From top: Tony Duquette Necklace, \$99,000, [modapopand.com](http://modapopand.com); Dress, \$498, [katespade.com](http://katespade.com); Jacket, \$4,900, [gucci.com](http://gucci.com); Skirt, \$2,095, [christopherkane.com](http://christopherkane.com); Handbag, \$3,300, Chanel, 214-520-1055

## Woman's Worst Friend

Many of us worry about face wrinkles, but what about all the ripples from the neck down? One line of attack: newfangled dermatologic procedures

**AGING CAN BE** partly chalked up to a loss of collagen production, which starts slowing down at a rate of 1% a year around age 38, gradually encouraging our skin to sag, according to Dr. Alan Durkin of Ocean Drive Plastic Surgery in Vero Beach, Fla. But women are braced for the exodus of skin-plumping collagen from our faces well before that, thanks to the beauty industry. Those who wish to stem it can arm themselves with creams, serums, Botox, fillers and laser treatments. Yet the message that collagen will also be replenished less actively in our hands, arms, belly, knees and butt around the same time hasn't been so crystal clear.

I've been girding myself from the neck up since I was a teenager, but I was wholly unprepared to glance down during a jog at age 32 and witness the skin above my knees rippling like a pair of cheap nylon pantyhose. In the past seven years, this loss of elasticity hasn't seen fit to reverse itself. Some of these body lines are now so deep, I could plant seeds in

them and apply for federal crop subsidies.

Even though I didn't anticipate this neck-down slump, the cosmetic medical industry has been on the case. "For several decades everyone focused on the face," said Dr. Paul Jarrod Frank, a cosmetic dermatologist with practices in New York City, the Hamptons and Miami. Now, noninvasive "lunchtime procedures" like those used to treat the face and neck have been developed for the body. For skin tightening using heat-based technologies, collagen production is stimulated through ultrasound and/or radio frequency, the latter of which is essentially waves of energy.

Ultherapy, promoted by 65-year-old model Christie Brinkley, transmits ultrasound energy to a deep tissue layer. Results can rival that of a surgical procedure, claimed Dr. Arash Akhavan, of the Dermatology and Laser Group in New York City. But the device is only FDA-approved for the brow, chin, neck and chest although many practices use it "off label" for other areas. More-



**BODY OF EVIDENCE** In 1987, a woman examines a Shar-Pei's skin folds at a Celebrate China festival in Colorado.

skeptical experts, like New York City plastic surgeon Dr. Lara Devgan—who is also the chief medical editor of an online cosmetic medicine database—say the price and pain threshold are too high to justify the unpredictable outcome. She wouldn't use it on herself and thus won't use it in her practice.

Physically cooler than Ultherapy is the new radio frequency treatment Emtone, a procedure Dr. Akhavan fa-

vors for toning skin on the midsection, buttocks and thighs. It uses heat and sound waves to initiate collagen production. "As far as before-and-afters and impressive results, it's the best I've seen," said Dr. Akhavan, who recommends starting with four sessions over two weeks and then scheduling a maintenance session every three months. Ballpark starting price: \$2,000 to \$3,000 for the butt and thighs.

Then there are injectable collagen biostimulators Radiesse (calcium hydroxylapatite) and Sculptra (poly-L-lactic acid). These long-acting fillers can be injected into the knees, thighs, buttocks, chest and inner arm. Dr. Devgan likens the immediate smoothing effect to "a fresh coat of paint" for crepey skin. Results last about a year and costs range from \$2,000 to \$10,000.

Those averse to trying ex-

pensive zapping and poking can try sleep, hydration, sunscreen and maintaining lean muscle mass, although those measures are more preventive than transformative. It's good to be wary of over-the-counter potions in a bottle. Edible collagen in particular is "absolute B.S.," according to Dr. Akhavan. Perhaps the only true solution is to embrace your inner Shar-Pei.

—Jessica Predale