

Lauren Bacall

THE LOOK



Cover: Richard Rutledge / Vogue ; © Condé Nast

GALLERY GUIDE

**“Indelible as her film career was,
Lauren Bacall ... also left a lasting impression on the fashion industry.”**
–*Women’s Wear Daily*, 2014

Lauren Bacall: The Look explores Lauren Bacall’s influence as a fashion icon through her life as a model, a film star, and a stage actress. A born-and-bred New Yorker, Bacall had a style that was practical yet chic. She embraced changes in fashion, but also sought out styles that exemplified her taste for classic, tailored ensembles. Bacall’s clothing choices emphasized confidence and wit over flashy accessories or excessive embellishment.

Bacall considered herself a collector of fashion. She respected and supported the fashion industry throughout her life, maintaining relationships with prominent fashion designers, she was a loyal client, a friend, and an occasional muse.

This gallery guide provides background information about Lauren Bacall and highlights objects from each section of the exhibition, her consistently well chosen wardrobe and her public personality.

**“Diana was always so terrific to me and about me.
She was so smart, had such wisdom.”**

–*Lauren Bacall, from her autobiography *By Myself* (1978)*

In 1942, shortly after turning eighteen, Bacall impressed Diana Vreeland, then editor-in-chief of Harper’s Bazaar, in a test-shoot photographed by Louise Dahl-Wolfe. Bacall said this event set her career in motion. She was subsequently featured in several fashion editorials, including the March 1943 cover of the magazine.

Due to Bacall’s age, Vreeland felt a protective responsibility toward the young model. When inquiries about her arrived at the editor’s Manhattan office, Vreeland saw that they were forwarded to Bacall’s mother. One letter that passed across Vreeland’s desk was from Hollywood film director Howard Hawks, whose wife had brought Bacall’s Harper’s Bazaar cover photo to his attention.

**“Don’t call her Lauren and don’t call her Baby.
To friends she’s Betty and to everyone else she’s Ms. Bacall.”**

– *Stephen Bogart, *Bogart: in Search of My Father*, 1995*

Lauren Bacall was born Betty Joan Perske in September 1924. Following her parents divorce in 1932, she took her mother’s maiden name Bacal. She added the extra ‘l’ when she started acting to avoid confusion regarding pronunciation. In 1943, Betty Bacall arrived in Hollywood for a screen test with film director Howard Hawks.

Hawks is credited with helping Bacall to refine her signature husky voice. Feeling there was nothing more unattractive than a shrieking woman, Hawks instructed Bacall to practice speaking in a consistently low register, so that even when she became excited, her voice would remain throaty and seductive. The director also helped Bacall choose a stage name. In her autobiography, she recounts that Hawks “wanted to give her a good first name to go with her last name.” He instructed her to tell reporters that Lauren was her great-grandmother’s name, about which Bacall later exclaimed, “What invention!”



Harper’s Bazaar, March 1943
Cover
Photograph by Louise Dahl-Wolfe

GALLERY GUIDE



Christian Dior, evening dress and belt
1968, France
Silk jersey, ostrich feathers, metal,
silk organza, sequins, beads
The Museum at FIT, 76.69.3

“I’m not a radical designer, what some people want is the birthday cake and fireworks. I can’t. I won’t do that.”

- Marc Bohan, “Bacall and the Boys,” 1968

Marc Bohan’s design philosophy perfectly suited Bacall’s penchant for simplicity. During the 1960s and 1970s, while fashion was becoming increasingly embellished and flamboyant, Bohan successfully updated classic silhouettes with simple details that were evocative of such trends, without creating garments that were over-the-top. The slim silhouette, jersey fabric, and dark color of this dress are modest and refined, while the ostrich feather trim adds flair and subtle drama.

**“ What I like most –
clothes that are tailored but easy”**
- Lauren Bacall, 1978

This black pantsuit exemplifies both Bacall’s practical, chic aesthetic as well as Ungaro’s skilled craftsmanship. Emanuel Ungaro trained as a tailor with his father before working for the acclaimed couturiers Cristobal Balenciaga and André Courrèges. His skill for tailoring is evident in the wide-leg trousers– a style consistently favored by Bacall – while his talent for draping is seen in the peplum blouse with its feminine yet understated bow-tied collar. Bacall favored styles such as this throughout her life, wearing similar ensembles in photographs taken in 1946 and 2011.



Emanuel Ungaro
Pantsuit
Circa 1973, France
Silk damask
The Museum at FIT, 78.257.3



“With her very New York way of looking at fashion, which called for ‘this kind of skepticism,’ she made a case to rebel against anything loud or vulgar. I don’t know that I could find another New Yorker, or American for that matter, who has that. There was never too much makeup.

The hair was never too high. You only notice her in the dress.”

- Isaac Mizrahi, 2014

Bacall was a fashion tastemaker throughout her life. In 1995, she received the Fashion Icon Award from the Council of Fashion Designers of America. Her look continues to influence contemporary fashion designers, including Donna Karan, Michael Kors, Ralph Lauren, and Raf Simons, as well as make-up artist Bobbi Brown.

Lauren Bacall
THE LOOK