

Oh you pretty things!

Uncompromising and innovative, Bowie's influence upon culture and design extends way beyond his musical output. His stage craft and the array of costumes, particularly from the Ziggy Stardust and Aladdin Sane eras, introduced androgynous style and aesthetics that many found both challenging and inspiring and paved the way for the glam rock and new romantics eras' many followers.



V&A

David Bowie Is

In 2013 the V&A Museum in London gained access to a collection of artifacts from the David Bowie archive for its 'David Bowie Is' exhibition, including posters, photographs and album covers. The exhibition was seen by over two million people around the world as part of its international tour, becoming one of the V&A's most popular exhibitions of all time. Now the museum has been gifted over 80,000 items spanning six decades of Bowie's career which will be on display in East London from 2025.

The new collection includes items from his early career in the 1960s to his death in 2016, ranging from stage costumes including his Ziggy Stardust creations designed by Freddie Burretti (1972), Kansai Yamamoto's flamboyant creations for the Aladdin Sane tour (1973) and the Union Jack coat designed by Bowie and Alexander McQueen for the Earthling album cover (1997). The archive also includes handwritten lyrics for songs including Fame (1975), Heroes (1977) and Ashes to Ashes (1980), as well as examples of his 'cut up' method of writing lyrics.

The archive also includes a photo collage of film stills from the Nicolas Roeg directed film The Man Who Fell to Earth (1975-76), over 70,000 images taken by some of the 20th century's leading photographers from Terry O'Neill to Brian Duffy and Helmut Newton. There are also instruments, amps, and other equipment, including Brian Eno's

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EMS synthesizer and a stylophone – a gift from Marc Bolan in the late 1960s, used on Bowie's Space Oddity recording. Additionally, the archive holds a series of intimate notebooks from every era of Bowie's life and career.

The archive will be made open to the public through the creation of The David Bowie Centre for the Study of Performing Arts at V&A East Storehouse, in Stratford's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The acquisition and creation of The Centre has been made possible thanks to the David Bowie Estate and a generous donation of £10m from the Blavatnik Family Foundation and Warner Music Group. The gift will support the ongoing conservation, research, and study of the archive.

Glam rockers

The 1970s saw a wide range of fashion styles come and go, often associated with the rapidly changing music scene. From hippie through glam, disco, punk, the 70s was a period of fast paced change in fashion. Bowie was at the forefront of introducing stage costumes and LP cover art that challenged expectations of musical artists and their images. Marc Bolan was perhaps the initiator of glam rock following his appearance on Top of the Pops in 1971 and influenced not just Bowie, but other artists of the period including Roxy Music, Rod Stewart, Sweet, Elton John and Queen. Many were relatively short lived but Bowie's

ability to reinvent himself through a series of personas ensured his longevity as an artist and style influencer.

Sharp dressed man

His move away from glam in the 1980s saw him adopt a more conventional style in his stage costumes and music videos. Glam had not been a major feature of the US and Europe and as it died away in the UK in the late 1970s the period saw a move towards suits and less colourful attire, with bands such as ABC, The Human League and Soft Cell toning down, despite the New Romantics and Boy George continuing to fly the flag for outrageous fashion. More recently, shocking through music artists' fashion choices has continued with Lady Gaga and Madonna pushing boundaries but perhaps the era of shock has largely passed.

Bowie continued to provide the inspiration for maintaining elegance in fashion. His legacy is perhaps that many artists, and the general public, felt they could choose to dress and display as they wanted, without feeling threatened or ashamed. The prevalence of different styles since his initial glam period has now meant that it has become harder to gain the attention that Bowie's initial arrival provoked. ✕



www.vam.ac.uk/collections/david-bowie

