



Wife Dressing: The Fine Art of Being a Well-Dressed Wife

By Anne Fogarty

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Wife Dressing: The Fine Art of Being a Well-Dressed Wife is a republishing of a fashion classic, with an updated introduction from fashion commentator Rosemary Feitelberg. Fashion icon Anne Fogarty's advice for the style-conscious woman is every bit as witty today as it was when it was originally published in 1959. Feitelberg's additional text contextualizes Fogarty's original concepts, underscoring how Fogarty's observations and expertise still hold true.

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Wife Dressing: The Fine Art of Being a Well-Dressed Wife By Anne Fogarty Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #886451 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Glitterati Incorporated
- Published on: 2007-12-13
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.60" h x 1.01" w x 6.27" l, 1.51 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 196 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

Does This Book Make Me Look Chic?

As I perused nine style books, some of the best advice I found was actually contained in a reprint of a 50-year-old book with the rather shocking title of "Wife Dressing: The Fine Art of Being a Well-Dressed Wife."

"The sole arbiter of what you wear is your own judgment," says its author, a thrice-married career woman named Anne Fogarty, who published the book in 1959. Its wisdom stems in large part from Ms. Fogarty's refreshing lack of concern with youth: Apparently, back in 1959, it was enough to be smart and appropriate.

"Wife Dressing" also lacks pictures, though there are black-and-white sketches for chapters like "After the trousseau what?" and "Am wife will travel." Rosemary Feitelberg, a writer at Women's Wear Daily, found the original volume at a fashion exhibition. "I expected to hate it," says Ms. Feitelberg. Instead, she found a publisher.

After getting my gag reflex under control, I discovered that when read through the prism of history, "Wife Dressing" provides laughs and -- despite some detours into petticoats and such -- is chock-full of sage advice.

It's still true that bras "probably need more replenishing than any other underwear item" because they lose their hold over time. There is harsh guidance on clearing out closets to reveal the good stuff: "Compress your wardrobe. Be relentless." And there is the chapter on taste and money, in which Ms. Fogarty reminds us where the buck stops, at any age: your own judgment. -- *Wall Street Journal*, March 19, 2008

Dressing the Part

Every now and then, some funny things come across my desk. My new favorite is an advance of *Wife Dressing: The Fine Art of Being a Well-Dressed Wife*. Written in 1959 by former model-turned-fashion-designer/wife/mother Anne Fogarty, it contains some hilariously kitschy advice that reflects the thoughts of the day:

From chapter 1, "The first principle of wife dressing is Complete Femininity -- the selection of clothes as adornment, not as a mere covering ... the wedding ring is only the beginning. When your husband's eyes light up as he comes in at night, you're in sad shape if it's only because he smells dinner cooking."

From chapter 4, "A chronic blight on the American home scene is sleepwear in the kitchen! Negligees, bathrobes and terry towels do NOT belong with food, pots and pans. The kitchen is your natural setting as a woman and you should look beautiful, not bedraggled, in it."

From chapter 10, "White gloves are only effective when they're snowy, glisteningly white. If you like white cotton gloves as much as I do, wash them after each wearing."

But embedded within all this amusing instruction is tried-and-true advice that still works today: Remember to blot your lips before dining to avoid leaving tacky lipstick rings on glasses. Don't wear a tight dress to a buffet dinner party in case you end up sitting on the floor. And my favorite: six things to ask yourself before

buying something on sale (number six: Will it pay its own way as a member of my wardrobe, not just loll as a temporary guest in the back of the closet?).

The intro by Women's Wear Daily writer Rosemary Feitelberg puts it all into context, sharing some details behind the author's life and showing us how far we've come -- and how some things never change. It's a great gift for any of your engaged fashionista pals -- or be totally modern and buy it for yourself. (Thankfully, we can do that nowadays!) It hits bookstores on February 14, 2008, from publisher Glitterati, Incorporated. -- Susan -- *Destination Wedding, January 10, 2008*

Dressing the Part

If the title, "Wife Dressing: The Fine Art of Being a Well-Dressed Wife," doesn't stop you in your tracks, some of the tips in designer Anne Fogarty's 1959 prefeminist fashion-advice chestnut surely will. Consider this line from the chapter entitled "Am Wife, Will Travel": "I would personally rather stay home than travel with three pairs of shoes. Last year, for a ten-day rest at Boca Raton, I brought eighteen dresses and twenty pairs of shoes." The book's just been re-released by Glitterati, with a new introduction by Rosemary Feitelberg (Style. "You have to wonder if Anne Fogarty wasn't in on the joke," Feitelberg says. "She talks about all this stuff, but she was a working woman with a successful career. She had a weekly radio show, she made store appearances. This kind of thing is common today, but she was a real go-getter in her era." Whether Fogarty, who was three times a wife, meant it or not, reading about choosing a coat to match your car (for those trips to the station to pick up hubby from the 5:07) will make you feel very grateful that things have changed. -- *Style.com*

Fashion Wisdom & Wit from the Late 50s

When designer Anne Fogarty first published *Wife Dressing: The Fine Art of Being a Well-Dressed Wife* in 1959, her witty blend of fashion savvy and wifely advice encapsulated the sensibilities of the era, and women everywhere embraced her observations and expertise.

Opinionated, outspoken, yet always a lady, Fogarty speaks her mind on a wide range of sartorial subjects: what comprises good and bad taste, what fashion rules were meant to be broken, and appropriate attire for every occasion. (Of course, having an 18" waist doesn't hurt when it comes to being fabulous, whether the occasion is a TV interview on Edward R. Murrow's *Person to Person* or an intimate soirée chez Fogarty.)

While some of the material in *Wife Dressing* is delightfully kitschy, much is still as relevant as when it was published almost half a century ago. "You are you," she advises. "You are not the model in that photograph or the girl beside you in an elevator or a woman eating lunch at the next table. What they are wearing may stop traffic, but be sure it's right for you before emulating the effect."

With charming stylish pen-and-ink sketches throughout and even a Chic Test to determine your own Fashion IQ, *Wife Dressing* is an entertaining walk down memory lane--in the proper foot attire, of course! -- *Fashiontribe.com, January 15, 2007*

Fogarty wrote a book called *Wife Dressing* in 1959, a guide for "the fine art of being a well-dressed wife with provocative notes for the patient husband who pays the bills." In the book she recognized that women led varied lives working, as students, wives, and mothers, and encouraged women to find their own style and color--recommending an understated, natural look that did not slavishly follow the fashion of the day. -- *FashionEncyclopedia.com*

In 1959, Ann Fogarty's book "Wife Dressing: The Fine Art of Being a Well-Dressed Wife", was released for

the first time in New York. Now, nearly 50 years later, it has been re-released the use and entertainment of us younger wives. The age of this book becomes extra clear with the "provocative notes for the patient husband who pays the bills".

Since I got married this summer, I have sometimes found it amusing to play my role to the full. Get dressed up in some 50's housewife dress and apron and bake cookies for our guests. In this case the book is an excellent source for how to stay stylish and fashion conscious in a 50's kind of way. But it is also so much more than that...

Even though the initial release of this book was so long ago, much of it's content is just as useful today. Like the chapter on how to care for your wardrobe. "Uniformity of hangers gives your wardrobe cohesion. It's good for your morale to open your closet door and see everything looking nice." It couldn't be more true.

Or the chapter on taste and money. "A clothes budget is like Einstein's theory. It's based on relativity. The relative value of perhaps one very expensive coat against two less costly; of one good fur against a couple of fake furs; of an extreme high-fashion item against a classic." And she also brings to the attention how good taste and money don't necessarily depend on each other. A good starting point on the subject.

And lets not forget about the husband in all of this, after all he pays the bills. He's for example mentioned when it comes to personal grooming: "When your husband's eyes light up as he comes at in at night, you're in sad shape if it's only because he smells dinner cooking."

The fun thing is that when you expect the book to be all about silly fashion rules or just to be very conservative in general, it's actually quite open to experimenting with clothes (although within certain limits) and quite funny, something that becomes clear on the chapter on breaking the rules as well as the fashion IQ test at the end of the book. And I guess that these days, with all kinds of synthetic materials and bad tailoring, that it is a useful source for how to care for (and wear) tweeds and furs like they used in the old days. But while it does contain useful advice and helpful ideas, I would rather recommend it as a sweet gift to a newly married (or engaged) girlfriend, or perhaps just a little something to amuse yourself with. --
StyleBytes.net, January 22, 2008

It's the attitude that strikes one when reading these excerpts. While typically fifties in many ways, there is something about pride and a sense of femininity that is missing in today's society (to say nothing of a willingness to please those lucky males who were able to view them). Very nostalgic. That sense of mystery is gone, that sense that women possess something that men will NEVER be able to own--that makes them so special (and that many of us try to emulate!)--all portrayed through their clothing! The sounds of the petticoat, its scent, and its ability to make the lady that much more inaccessible--so exciting--makes it a unique garment. So sad that it is gone, apparently forever! -- *Pettipond.com*

Pinafores, and Power Moves

IF the drag queen John Epperson -- better known by his diva name, Lypsinka (she of the arched brows, Joan Crawford lips and not-so-well-contained hysteria) -- is looking for inspiration for his next one-woman show, he need look no further.

The re-release of a popular 1959 fashion guide, "Wife Dressing," written by the thrice-divorced tastemaker and dressmaker Anne Fogarty (who championed petticoats, fur handbags and tightly belted coveralls, and also created a dress line that was a hit at Lord & Taylor) would give him plenty of material, with crinolines to spare.

Ms. Fogarty was a woman who never had fewer than six sets of pajamas in her "active sleep wardrobe"; who

took 20 pairs of shoes for a 10-day vacation in Boca Raton, Fla.; who traveled to Europe with 22 petticoats (at customs in Ireland, a suitcase holding 18 of them exploded like a comedian's can of snakes); and who once woke her husband at the beach before breakfast by ironing petticoats on her side of the bed. Strangely, despite the faultless wardrobe, the marriage didn't last.

Ms. Fogarty instructs wives to wear lovely "pinafores, organdies and aprons" and "gay cotton wrap-arounds" while scrambling eggs for breakfast, because "the kitchen is your natural setting as a woman and you should look beautiful, not bedraggled in it."

Is this the stuff of comedy or tragedy?

There's a lot of affection in this workaholic, come-as-you-are age for the ladylike Jackie-O era, when women didn't leave the house without girdles or white cotton gloves (one of Ms. Fogarty's fixations). This book, as it amuses however mildly and accidentally, shows the folly of such nostalgia. -- *New York Times*, April 6, 2008

When a Wife Has to be Well Dressed Arm Candy

I just finished reading *Wife Dressing: The Fine Art of Being a Well-Dressed Wife* by the late fashion maven Anne Fogarty, and I've changed my mind. Now the 1950s are looking very good to me.

The book was first published in 1959 - prime time in my mother's life - and has just been re-issued with an introduction by fashion writer Rosemary Feitelberg.

It is about the care and feeding of a woman's wardrobe so that she will always look great for her husband and her appearance will never reflect badly on him.

As a wife, she writes, you are "an appendage of your husband, Adam's rib that was separated from him to form woman and now spiritually return to his side."

Retro, dated and sexist, sure. But Fogarty's irrepressible enthusiasm for her subject makes this book a delight. It is a combination of fashion savvy and wifely advice, and it gives a pretty clear picture of what was expected of women in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

For those of us who had mothers who lived during the time of kid gloves, fur wraps, billowing petticoats and dressing up to go into town, reading this book is like waking from a half-remembered dream.

"Wife-dressing is many things," Fogarty begins. "An art. A science. A labor of love. A means of self-expression. And, above all, a contributing factor to a happy marriage."

Dress for everything, she advises, and dress appropriately. Never wear an aging cocktail dress to the office or a beat-up wool for housework. "Their original design was for something quite different and they will be uncomfortable as well as unattractive."

Fogarty, who brags lightly about her 18-inch waist, had rules that must be followed: Be relentless in weeding out of your wardrobe items that are out of style, and only shop for clothes when you are in the right mood or you will make poor choices.

And she had rules you can break - tweeds are not just for the country. "I love tweed for cocktails in town." And you can dress your child in black if she has dark hair and the skin tones of a Renaissance portrait.

My parents lived on the fringe of the world Fogarty describes. A time when the executive came home to find a martini waiting for him. A time when having the boss and his wife to dinner was a career move. A time

when silk brocade lounging pajamas were an extravagant gift from him to her.

In Fogarty's world, every woman looked like Tippi Hedren in *The Birds* - perfectly turned out, even in gathering doom.

"A healthy respect for your clothes shows an even healthier respect for your body and yourself as a person and a wife," she wrote. "Your husband may tease you about 'Care and Feeding,' but you may be sure his teasing will be tempered with pride."

I think I would have loved to live in that world, where a woman's dressing room was filled with cashmere and silk and leather and pearls instead of jeans, cotton Ts and sensible shoes. A world where the occasion dictated what you wore, and if you followed the rules, you always looked the part you were playing. --
Baltimore Sun, February 3, 2008

From the Publisher

Timeless advice from Anne Fogarty's WIFE DRESSING:

"Fashion is for today. Don't look back. Don't look further ahead than the current season. Don't save the dress that won't whistles the summer before last. The whistles may turn to groans."

"You are you. You are not the model in that photograph or the girl beside you in an elevator of a woman eating lunch at the next table. What they are wearing may stop traffic, but be sure it's right for you before emulating the effect."

"Don't be fooled. Don't be cajoled. Don't be `conned.' Don't let the mythical `they' who supposedly dictate fashion from above squash your individuality."

"Expense does not assure good taste, nor is `good' taste necessarily expensive to acquire."

"My bargain motto is, `If it's something you wouldn't buy at the regular price, why buy it now?'"

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ron Lauer:

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