

Explore Article 1: Tory Burch: What Shall I Wear Today?

Do you ever wonder how a designer comes up with ideas to make a lot of different things that are distinguishable from one another? Different jackets? Different dresses? Different shoes? Different accessories?

Tory Burch is an American fashion designer and businesswoman who gets her creative ideas from a wide variety of sources. When she started her business in 2004 from her kitchen, she was influenced by the simplicity of the Quakers and their culture. She had attended a Quaker school as a child and their simple culture appealed to her. Her first efforts at design were included in more than fifteen categories of products, including everything from towels to totes to tunics. She focused on being a lifestyle brand from the beginning. She incorporated bold colors and patterns in her loose tunics and wide-legged pants. Her best ideas featured beautifully embroidered lace dresses and tops, embellished with metal chains, discs, and coins. Gold link bracelets and chains completed the look. She finished off many outfits with practical canvas booties trimmed in retro rubber soles and toecaps, achieving a kind of bohemian look.



Tory was born on June 17, 1966, in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Her father, Ira Earl “Bud” Robinson, was a wealthy investor who had inherited a stock exchange seat and a paper cup company. He sold his company soon after inheriting it and spent his life managing his investments. He influenced Tory through his desire to travel and his attention to his own clothes.

Her mother, Reva Schapira Robinson, had been an aspiring actress in her youth who had lived for a time in Greenwich Village. She continues to be instrumental in Tory’s development as a designer. After some fifty-odd years of marriage, Reva and Bud still make a yearly trek to Morocco where they buy art and clothing that mirrors the culture. As with the Quaker influence, the exotic colors and textures that represent the culture of that country influenced Tory’s early clothing designs. Her parents became collectors of art from around the world, inspiring Tory’s love of bright color, texture, and different geometric shapes. Like her parents, Tory continues to travel the world for inspiration.

After graduation from high school, Tory attended the University of Pennsylvania and earned a degree in art history. Her first job was at Benetton in the King of Prussia mall. After she graduated from college, she relocated to New York where she was given a job by the Yugoslavian designer Zoran, who was her mother’s friend. After working with Zoran for a short while, she went to work at *Harper’s Bazaar* magazine where she wrote about fashion and designers. Then she went from writing about fashion to working in public relations and advertising departments at Vera Wang, Polo Ralph Lauren, and Loewe.

Tory and Christopher Burch married in 1996 and had three sons. By 2005, she and Christopher brought all her experiences to bear on building her own garment business. In 2005, her fledgling business shifted into high gear when one of her producers gave Oprah Winfrey a tunic for Christmas. The tunic had been inspired by Tory’s Moroccan designs. Oprah loved it and praised Tory’s sense of style. She invited Tory to the Oprah Show in April 2005, where she announced that Tory was “the next big thing in fashion.” The next day, Tory’s business website received eight million hits.

At the time, Tory was having problems in her marriage with her co-owner, but inspired by Oprah’s endorsement, she continued to grow her business. Chris had invested \$2 million into the business. In spite of his commitment to her business, in 2006, they divorced acrimoniously. They tried to maintain Tory Burch, the business, despite their discord. In June of 2011, Chris sold most of his shares in the Tory Burch enterprise. He opened his own retail stores which were similar to Tory’s. One friend said his stores looked like “Tory 2.0 and she didn’t like it.” In September, Burch organized her first fashion show. She continues to hold shows each season during New York Fashion Week. In March of 2012, Chris was forced

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out as Tory Burch's board co-chairman. In January 2013, Chris sold the remaining stock he owned in her company. He was required to remove all inventory and store decorations that were reminiscent of her company. She kept the company name—Tory Burch.

In the fall of 2013, Tory developed her first fragrance collection with the Estée Lauder company. In the summer of 2014, she created a line of accessories for the Fitbit tracking device. She was the first fashion designer to introduce wearable technology. Following her Fitbit accessories, she designed a separate sportswear line called Tory Sport. The variety of items and different styles are the keys to her success. These days, her influences are less tied to a specific time or place. She began experimenting with design, shape, and fabrics. Her collections became more masculine, less repetitive. The colors changed too: fewer bright oranges, more lime greens. According to *Forbes* magazine, she became a billionaire in 2013.

As of 2018, the company had set up 250 stores all over the world. The fashion line includes ready-to-wear garments, shoes, handbags, accessories, watches, home decor, and a fragrance and beauty products collection. In addition to being featured in her signature Tory Burch stores, her products are also sold in more than 3,000 department and specialty stores across the world.

Today Tory's collections are younger, subtler, and weirder, capturing the attention of a new generation of women while surprising anyone who has come to expect no surprises from this stable, all-American brand. She continues to work with her family, including two of her stepdaughters; her brother is head of legal and corporate development; and her third husband, Pierre-Yves Roussel, the former CEO of the Louis Vuitton fashion group, is now her CEO.

She uses her wealth to assist other women in business. She founded the Tory Burch Foundation, which supports the economic empowerment of women. She provides small business loans, grants, affordable loans to women entrepreneurs, mentoring, and education. She includes the products created by women in her stores.

Tory Burch is one of the only American brands with a luxury business model, selling mostly direct-to-consumer, with a solid record not just in handbags and footwear but also in a wide range of categories. After Roussel arrived in early 2019 and took over managing the corporation, Burch went to work with new gusto. She built a workshop for seamstresses and tailors in her office, and her team has also been smart about embracing young, creative influencers.

"Everyone loves the Toryssance—the cool clothes, the cool girls—but let's not forget about the classics," says Liana Satenstein, fashion writer for *Vogue* magazine. "I want to be buried in these shoes,¹ for the record."

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¹ The Reva ballet flat, named for her mother, is a classic ballet flat with a double T medallion on the toe.