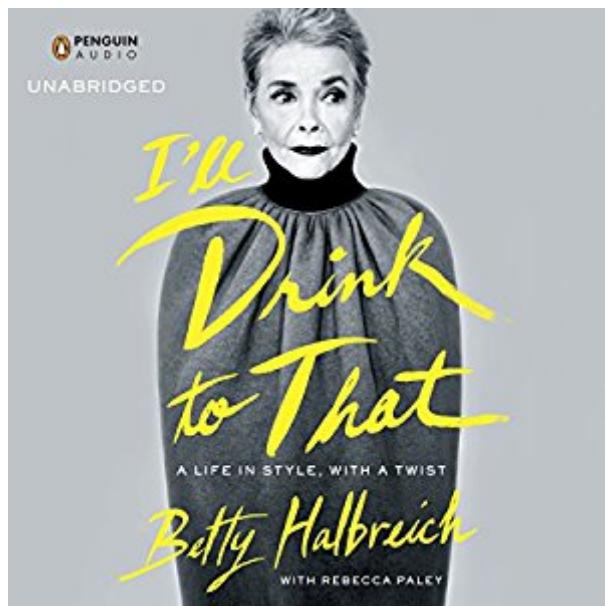


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I'll Drink To That: A Life In Style, With A Twist



Synopsis

A classic tale of personal transformation amid a stunning backdrop of old world glamour and current high style, Betty Halbreich moves from a trapped woman to a ferociously independent icon. Eighty-six-year-old Betty Halbreich is a true original. A tough broad who could have stepped straight out of Stephen Sondheim's repertoire, she has spent nearly 40 years as the legendary personal shopper at Bergdorf Goodman, where she works with socialites, stars, and ordinary women off the street. She has helped many find their true selves through clothes, frank advice, and her own brand of wisdom. She is trusted by the most discriminating persons - including Hollywood's top stylists - to tell them what looks best. But Halbreich's personal transformation from a cosseted young girl to a fearless truth teller is the greatest makeover of her career. A Chicago native, Halbreich moved to Manhattan at 20 after marrying the dashing Sonny Halbreich, a true character right out of Damon Runyon who liked the nightlife of New York in the '50s. On the surface, they were a great match, but looks can be deceiving; an unfaithful Sonny was emotionally distant while Halbreich became increasingly anguished. After two decades, the fraying marriage finally came undone. Bereft without Sonny and her identity as his wife, she attempted suicide. Meticulous, impeccable, hardworking, elegant, and - most of all - delightfully funny, Halbreich has never been afraid to tell it to her clients straight. She won't sell something just to sell it. If an outfit or shoe or purse is too expensive, she'll dissuade you from buying it. As Halbreich says, "There are two things nobody wants to face: their closet and their mirror." She helps women do both, every day.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Because I've been pushing my comfort zone when it comes to reading material, I decided to go far afield and tackle this book. I thought there was a good chance I'd feel indifferent towards it - or possibly even loathe it. Instead, I found it entertaining and I write that as someone who has no inclination to buy designer clothing, shop at Bergdorf Goodman or learn about working with celebrities, all of which are covered in this book. But those topics are only part of what is contained inside. While I may not be inherently riveted by books about fashion or celebrities, I AM drawn to memoirs which focus on the unique personalities and talents of men and women who have created a special place for themselves in the world. And Betty Halbreich has certainly accomplished that feat. At 86, she is still a personal shopper for Bergdorf Goodman, a job she created for herself 40 years ago. She describes that part of her life in detail and yes, she also dishes about celebrities and reveals some of their quirks and insecurities. But she also spends a fair amount of time remembering her childhood, a very lonely childhood. This was the part of her memoir which pulled at my heartstrings and set the stage for everything else. The rest of the book fell into place after she described so poignantly how "clothes were my playmates." I ached for her when I read of the parents who were rarely there and even of Christmas holidays where she opened a wealth of presents - but all by herself. That was when I understood why she was drawn to a career in fashion, not as some trivial pursuit, but as a way to create a deeper meaning for both herself and other women. Clothes were her comfort. Clothes represented security and perhaps a refuge (or at least that's how it appeared to me as I read this memoir). No wonder becoming a personal shopper was a natural fit for her. And no wonder she could share some of her passion with other women who could benefit from her gift for finding the perfect dress or ensemble. While this memoir did hold my interest most of the time, there were sections where I felt impatient and wanted to move on to the next part. To be fair, this may have been because I couldn't relate to long descriptions of designer fabrics, the type of clothing that accommodates various body shapes or the demise of anything larger than sizes 4, 6, or 8 when there are plenty of women who need attractive clothing in other sizes. Perhaps many other readers will find these topics more in line with their interests. But as noted above, reading this book was a reach for me, not the type of book I generally buy. Even so, I did finish this one with an appreciation for Halbreich's honesty about the woman she ultimately became and in facing perhaps her greatest challenge: learning how to be alone. She calls this her "last step" so I think it is fair to consider it quite an accomplishment for her. She also notes that "the terrible fear of loneliness kept me from knowing myself, but now I am happy, because I do know myself." As for me, I'm glad to have had the opportunity to have gotten a glimpse of her life. I want to note that I

received a free review copy of this book in exchange for an honest review. My reviews are never affected or altered by having received review copies

I adored this book. I appreciate good fashion style, but I hate to shop for clothes and rarely do, but since I love a good memoir, I gave this a go. I liked the author's voice from the start. I also love all references to Chicago since I lived there for 60 years and went to school in Hyde Park. I remember Stanley Korshak's store and ate at The Drake often. And learning her mother ran The Oak Street Book Shop -- oh my! It was the first stop on my walk from home to the IC to go to school. So if you are from Chicago, you will dig that aspect. I also know Miami and New York, where the author spent significant time, so that was fun, too..The author was painstakingly honest, which always endears me to the writer. Her early life was one both of privilege and neglect. She was truly the stereotype of the pre-feminist era housewife for many years--not working, dependent on her husband for her weekly allowance, living in a small world of shopping, making herself pretty, and attending social events. I would have been popping pills like crazy. My mother was close in age to the author. When she was accepted to the University of Chicago, she was offered a great job (during WWII) which ultimately gave her a career. I feel lucky my mom had that opportunity and was brave enough to do the unconventional. I grew up thinking women were as smart and strong as men. But my friends' mothers were more like this author--living in the 1950's world of dependency on men. It seems to me Ms. Halbreich's soul journey in this life involved learning to be independent because ultimately, in New York, she had to. She was so brave!!! And became such a cool person, an artist really, and helped a lot of people. She became multi-dimensional and ultimately whole. Right on sister!!

Having little interest in fashion, I'm not sure why I chose this book to read. I guess because Betty Halbreich is being described as a "tough broad". "Tough broads" can be very interesting people. Only, Ms. Halbreich doesn't come across that tough in this memoir. She actually seems pretty vulnerable. She also doesn't come across that amusing, as she has so often been described by others, and as she appears in the documentaryÃ Ã Scatter My Ashes at Bergdorfs. But that doesn't meanÃ Ã I'll Drink to That: A Life in Style, with a TwistÃ Ã is not an interesting read. It is and it's one of the most unique memoirs I have read in the last few years. One reason being that the 86-year-old Ms. Halbreich is old enough to see her life in a much clearer light than most much younger memoir writers. A second reason is she does not come across at all like a shallow snob, or someone who thinks the world begins and ends with extremely expensive clothes. A third reason is she sees herself as also being a therapist of sorts, not just a personal shopper. There are indeed

some intriguing insights in the books, such as when she states: "The lust for clothes is a brilliant defense mechanism (particularly if you are a person of means). The displacement of love, affection, and attention onto a pair of shoes or a dress has built an entire industry. Like all good defenses, however, they are best used in moderation and only when one understands a little of the motivations that lurk beneath the surface." And like all good therapists and personal shoppers, Ms. Halbreich does not dish out any dirt to the readers of this memoir about any and all of her famous clients. She wouldn't have lasted so long in the field, if she did such a thing. The closest she comes to saying anything negative about a named famous client is when she tells how Mia Farrow came in one day to try on a dress she was to wear in a play. After learning it costs \$125, Ms. Farrow exclaimed: "Do you know how many meals this would buy for the children in Biafra?" In the book, Ms. Halbreich says: "No, I didn't. At the time I didn't even know where Biafra was." I'll Drink to That: A Life in Style, with a Twist provides readers with a fashionable glimpse of the life of a woman who was born into a wealthy family in Chicago, married into a wealthy family in New York, and then went on to do something she was told never to do--she got a job. A job at a store that caters to very, very wealthy people. But you don't need to be enthralled by rich and famous people or even clothes shopping to enjoy this book. You just need to be interested in the story of one woman who found her niche in the world, and is sharing with her readers the many insights about life that she has acquired from living for over eight decades.

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