Hairstyles

Definition  Styles or manners of arranging the hair

Several attention-getting hairstyles became popular during the 1980’s. Some reflected the luxury and lavishness of the decade, while others reflected the desire of alternative cultures to resist and stand out from the mainstream.

Diana, princess of Wales, was one of the people who influenced popular styles of the 1980’s. She wore her hair in a slick bob with a defined back neckline contour, a style that could be varied (combed forward or backward, for example) and one that was emulated throughout the decade. Television shows featuring the affluent and elegant had an influence on women’s hairstyles for the first time, although televisions had been in American homes since the 1950’s.

Adult Hairstyles  The television characters that most influenced American hairstyles were the fictitious Carringtons of Dynasty and the Ewings of Dallas, who stood for many Americans as symbols of financial achievement. Once they appeared on the screen, the overblown long hairstyles worn by the women in these evening soap operas became the rage. Krystle, a character on Dynasty played by Linda Gray, had a signature style consisting of platinum blond hair cut in a long, straight, bob, with bangs feathered back from her face. Usually, Krystle wore her hair down, but sometimes it was swept up and puffed out from the sides of her face. For Dynasty watchers, Krystle’s hairstyle was the perfect example of how to look in the 1980’s.

So-called big hair was the trend of the decade, even for women with short hair. Working women, who had to look tidy at the office, gave up hair rollers and opted for blow dryers and finger-shaping with wax as the favorite way to finish hair, or they wore long hair tied back. Long, sleek, and perfectly straight hair was another office look. Women’s hairstyles became increasingly long in the last half of the 1980’s, with the domination of blunt cuts that were worn straight across the back. Many new products, such as hair mousse and hair gels, along with the old standby hair spray, helped shape wayward tresses. However, the styled look of these products often lasted only one day, causing women to start washing their hair daily. In addition to shows about the wealthy, detective shows were also successful, particularly Miami Vice. Actor Don Johnson, one of the leads in the show, inspired men to adapt the fashion of beard stubble, or “five o’clock shadow,” at all hours.

The mullet was another popular hairstyle of the time, and although the cut could be varied, it consisted mainly of short hair on the sides and long hair in back. Mullets were popular in suburban and rural areas among working-class men. This trend contrasted with the conservative look favored by male business professionals, whose groomed, short hair remained part of the business uniform. Another hairstyle fashionable in the 1980’s was the Afro, first introduced by African Americans and then taken up by both men and women of European descent.

*Popular singer and actress Cher wears her hair in a distinctively 1980’s “big” style in 1985. (Hulton Archive/Getty Images)*
style worked for both short and long hair. Naturally curly long or medium hair or curled “permanent” styles were also popular. A corollary to the Afro’s popularity emerged in hairstyling techniques that started in the previous decade and lasted throughout the 1980’s. This was a set of embellishments to the Afro that included the art of hair weaving, dreadlocks, cornrows, and hair plaiting. Hairstyling among African diaspora stylists often exhibits the transmission and readaptation of Old World to New World styles, which then permeate the New World culture.

**Youth Styles** Pop star Madonna was known as the Material Girl, and many teenage girls and slightly older women copied her fashion look. They had to vary their style, as Madonna changed hairstyles frequently, although she usually wore her hair long. She wore it with a slightly raised crown and curls along her shoulders; perfectly straight with a variegated razor cut; in a long, very sleek bob; and in a straight, funky style below her shoulders, with razored layers of short hair near her face and longer hair at the sides and back to her breasts. Her hairstyles were the trendiest of the decade. Varied hair colors, made popular by pop singer Cyndi Lauper, induced many young women to experiment with dying their hair, and some hair products allowed these women to change their hair color as often as every day.

Another look adopted by the young was “street style,” also known as punk. It grew from the Goth look that represented a romantic vision of life shadowed by death. Goths wore black clothes with white pancake-makeup skin, and black dyed hair. The black hair was teased upward as far as it would go or gelled flat with a shaved or painted widow’s peak. The slang word “punk” can mean inferior or worthless, and the style arose as a revolt against the unstyled, free-flowing hair of the hippie generation. The scalp was often shaved with a “Mohawk” strip of hair running from nape to scalp. This strip of hair could be bleached, died a bright color, and then gelled into a tall fan that was startling in appearance.

**Impact** The excesses of the 1980’s soon became modified, as the stock market temporarily plummeted late in the decade and new environmental concerns dominated the media and seeped into people’s consciousness. The “If you’ve got it, flaunt it” attitude of the 1980’s was replaced by the “Less is more” slogan of the 1990’s. The decade of flamboyance couldn’t last and evolved into a simpler, less showy decade.

**Further Reading**


Sheila Golburgh Johnson

See also Consumerism; Fads; Fashions and clothing; *Flashdance*, Lauper, Cyndi; Madonna; MTV; Teen films.

---

**Halley’s comet**

**The Event** Astronomical body passes near Earth

**Date** 1985-1986

*The return of Halley’s comet to the inner solar system during the mid-1980’s resulted in the first satellite fly-by explorations of a comet.*

Halley’s comet (Comet 1P/Halley) is the brightest and most well known of all periodic comets, making a complete orbit of the Sun and returning to Earth’s vicinity every seventy-six years. Detailed observations of Halley’s comet have been recorded since 240 B.C.E. The comet is named for Edmond Halley (1656-1742), who was the first to recognize that the various objects witnessed in the sky at seventy-six-year intervals were actually the same object. The most recent return of Halley’s comet to the inner solar system was between autumn, 1985, and spring, 1986. During March and April, 1986, Halley’s comet could be viewed with the naked eye, if the observer was well south and far from urban lights. For most