



The Evolution of the Beauty Ideal

How Did Beauty Come to Be?

The need to understand beauty has propelled mankind forward, thrust scholars into the spotlight, forced others into reclusiveness, inspired creativity, and unleashed despair—and the debate over what defines beauty hasn't ended yet.

Body Ideals from the Stone Ages to the Nineteenth Century

Our physical shapes tell a complicated story of beauty, influenced by everything from ancient Greco-Roman perfectionism to Renaissance opulence and grandeur.

The 1900s + 1910s: Female Emancipation

In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, women cut their hair and entered the workforce, earning an education and gaining some personal freedoms.

The 1920s: Reframing the Female Silhouette

Flappers and fashionable women shed their corsets and expressed their individuality with penciled-in eyebrows and dark red lipstick. It was a look that was intended to shock.

The 1930s: The Influence of Hollywood and Stars

As the threat of war loomed, Hollywood provided a distraction with stars who had perfect smiles, curved figures, and tanned bodies, setting rather impossible standards.

The 1940s + 1950s: War Times and Big Business

Maintaining appearances was a matter of patriotic duty and the U. S. government deemed cosmetics "necessary and vital" to boosting the morale of citizens.

The 1960s + 1970s: Body Politics and Sexual Revolution

Against the backdrop of civil rights protests, youth and counterculture uprisings, and second-wave feminism, beauty became highly politicized.

The 1980s + Beyond: The Post-Sexual Revolution

The age of excess and the rise of the supermodels eventually gave way to minimalism, grunge, and a more androgynous beauty aesthetic.