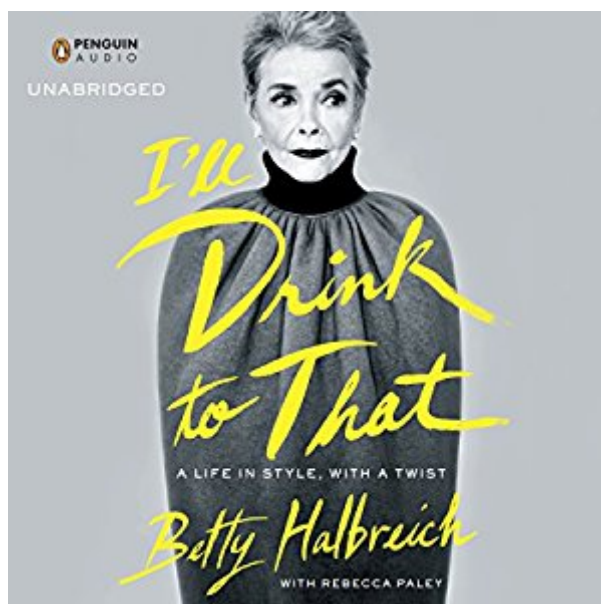


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I'll Drink To That: A Life In Style, With A Twist



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.

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 documentary Scatter My Ashes at Bergdorfs. But that doesn't mean I'll Drink to That: A Life in Style, with a Twist 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.

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