

[The Wall Street Journal](#) reviewed Susan J. Ashbrook's "[Will Work for Shoes: The Business Behind Red Carpet Product Placement](#)," describing it as a "voyeuristic peek behind the curtain" of Hollywood fashion and celebrity marketing. The review highlighted the book's look into intense brand competition and its potential as a guide for those in the industry. You can read more about the book, titled "[Will Work for Shoes: The Business Behind Red Carpet Product Placement](#)," on Amazon

## Books on Fashion's Secrets, Even Theft

Summer Style Reading Opens Windows on Power Dressing, Fashion Publicity and Shoplifting; Vintage Diana Vreeland

By  
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From left to right: 'Diana Vreeland' by Eleanor Dwight; 'The Steal: A Cultural History of Shoplifting' by Rachel Shteir; 'Power Dressing: First Ladies, Women Politicians and Fashion' by Robb Young; 'D.V.' by Diana Vreeland; and 'Anything Other Than Naked' by Glen R. Sondag. F. MARTIN RAMIN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

This is the time of year when we are, theoretically at least, granted more relaxing hours to enjoy quiet reading.

The latest crop of style books offer a broad range of choices, from a study of shoplifting that will make for sprightly dinner conversation to a pair of beach-worthy reads on Diana Vreeland, who is still influencing fashion years after her death. There's also smart and authoritative style advice—for world leaders, no less—that might be devoured on a plane. All in all, a surprisingly substantial group of style books.

Begin with "The Steal: A Cultural History of Shoplifting," published this month. If you recall Winona Ryder's 2001 shoplifting incident, you may wonder what causes a wealthy woman to shoplift \$5,500 of Yves St. Laurent, Marc Jacobs, and Donna Karan clothes.

Author Rachel Shteir offers a few possible answers while presenting a complex view of shoplifting in her richly researched, dry-witted book. Her historical reach includes surprising shoplifter King Henry IV of France and Abbie Hoffman, who expressed a sense of joyous entitlement in "Steal This Book" in 1971.

The section on anti-theft technology—from the creation of sensor tags for clothes to in-store cameras viewed from bunker-like facilities—is nothing short of creepy. You will never again feel alone in a store. Creepier still is the training given to stores' "loss prevention agents" on eliciting a shoplifting confession: "Don't let the suspect have a clicking pen. It will relieve stress and we don't want that."

Legendary fashion editor Diana Vreeland has come in for a comeback with paperback re-releases of two books. "D.V." will leave the reader wishing to have known her, or at least to have witnessed her in action. The memoir begins, "I loathe nostalgia." Within three pages, Ms. Vreeland has punched literary agent Swifty Lazar in the nose and treated Jack Nicholson's back pain by pasting an old-fashioned "plaster" on his bare backside.

If this all seems too perfect—it was co-edited by George Plimpton, and some anecdotes have Plimptonian pluck—then "Diana Vreeland" by Eleanor Dwight offers a more studious biography. It takes the reader from Ms. Vreeland's childhood through her high-society years at "Harper's Bazaar," "Vogue" and the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Ms. Vreeland had a bit of Coco Chanel in her, making up fibs about where she was born and raised. She claimed alternately Vladivostok and Africa's Atlas Mountains, but the truth, the book says, is nothing to be ashamed of: She was born in Paris and raised in New York. The life that followed was exciting enough to keep any reader entertained.

Many books address business style, but few adequately explore how truly powerful women dress. In "Power Dressing: First Ladies, Women Politicians & Fashion," Robb Young profiles of dozens of women. They include the obvious choices—Michelle Obama, and German chancellor Angela Merkel—as well as Tarja Halonen, the frumpy and friendly-looking president of Finland, and Tzipi Livni, the simple but elegant leader of Israel's Kadima party.

I found it liberating to see the variety of clothing these women choose, ranging from the couture worn by Rachida Dati, a member of the European Parliament, to the colorful saris of Sheikh Hasina Wazed, prime minister of Bangladesh. While powerful clothes come in a delightful variety of colors and shapes, they share a common ingredient: They cover the body like armor. Women of any age—and any career stage—will find strong ideas for self-presentation here, along with refreshing new style icons.

Gentlemen might ask: Why take style advice from Glen R. Sondag, a financial adviser and former U.S. Air Force captain? Well, for one thing, because his mother sewed and he helped her, so he knows his way around wool, cotton and silk. More to the point, Mr. Sondag has been working outside the fashion world for 35 years. His slim volume, "[Anything Other Than Naked](#)," is full of practical, direct advice.

If you have a closet full of custom suits, this book, billed as "a guide for men on how to dress properly for every occasion," may be too rudimentary. But it's an ideal nugget to tuck into the suitcase of your recent college graduate, who might benefit from an explanation of the differences between tab collars and spread collars.

Susan Ashbrook worked as a fashion publicist and founded Hollywood's Film Fashion agency before she penned "Will Work For Shoes: The Business Behind Red Carpet Product Placement." She means for her book—which is set to be published Sept. 1, though the publisher says pre-orders will ship earlier—to be a how-to manual for budding designers and publicists. But the result is also a voyeuristic peek behind the curtain.

The book could do with a little more name-dropping: I want to know the name of the celebrity who left a designer gown worth thousands of dollars hanging from her fence. Not to mention the name of the rival publicist in the knock-down-drag-out battle between Jimmy Choo and Escada to put shoes on the toes of actress Ziyi Zhang at the Academy Awards. It's just the sort of catfight we expect out of Hollywood—and fashion.

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