



DESIGN FOR DISABILITY

Design Cheatsheet, Timeline,
Get In Touch

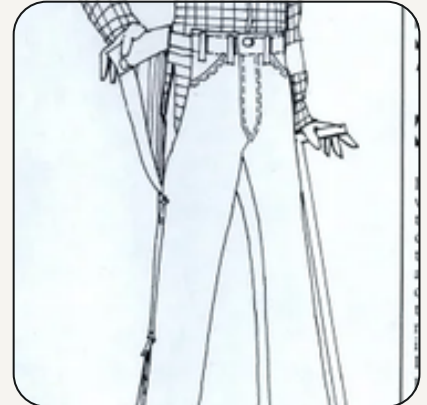
100 YEARS OF INNOVATIONS



**Victorian Hearing
Trumpet**



**1942: Arm & Leg Splint
Charles & Ray Eames**



**1960: Functional
Bellbottoms - Levis**



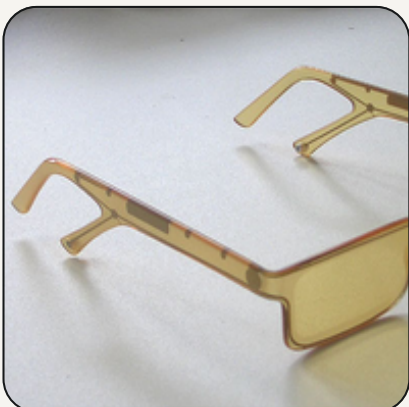
**202: FlyEase
Nike**



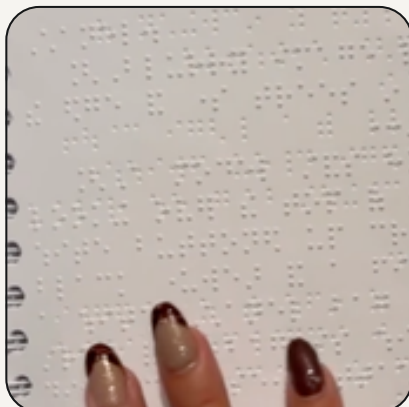
**2000: Knit 2 Together
Freddie Robins**



**1999: No.13 & Dazed
Alexander McQueen &
Aimee Mullins**



**2005: Surround Sound
The Industrial Facility**



**2023:
British Vogue in
Braille**



**2026: Hearing Aid
Jewelry - Jenni
Ahtiainen**

1837 - 2026

Before mass-production, there was no need to “adapt” design. All designs were individualised. Garments & accessories were made at home or by local seamstress to your size and individual need. I love this example of a Victorian hearing trumpet from the 19th century. The lace ruffles and the bow are fabulous!



During WWII Charles & Ray Eames designed a lightweight leg splint for the US Navy, proving that great design, born from constraint, could be both functional and beautiful. After the war, Dr. Howard Rusk launched a rehabilitation center at NYU with a radical philosophy: a patient isn't fully rehabilitated until they can dress themselves. Nearly 30% of US fashion designers shifted focus. Helen Cookman, known for innovating women's workwear, created Functional Fashions — a collection and guide for dressing with disability. It debuted in 1959 with 35,000 orders.

Helen Cookman's work at the rehab centre inspired others. Van Davis Odell, paralysed on her left side, built Fashion-Able from her own need — designing the lingerie and pyjamas she couldn't find, expanding into ready-to-wear. Meanwhile, Levi's was collaborating with Cookman on functional flare jeans so that, as one journalist wrote at the time, "people in wheelchairs or on crutches are now able to join the jeans generation."

**PRESENTED BY:
LISS SYSTEMS**



1980: "ADAPTIVE" FASHION

The term "adaptive" really wasn't used until 1980s and it was caretakers who began demanding easy-dressing garments. It was at this time when innovative design was no longer prioritised - rather, design was given consideration like hospital e. Some went back to custom design. Only glasses remained a site of innovation for D2C - it remained like this for decades.



90S & Y2K: ART CRITICISES DESIGN

In 1990 in the USA, the Americans with Disability Act was passed to prevent discrimination of PWD. In the late 90s, artists and designers were bringing the disabled body into critical conversation. In 1999, Alexander McQueen commissioned hand-carved prosthetic legs for Paralympic athlete Aimee Mullins — a pivotal moment for couture. Textile artist Freddie Robins used knitting's cozy warmth to question the exactness of language about disability in *Adorn, Equip*. In 2005, Hearwear (RNID & V&A) brought 17 designer concepts asking why eyewear had become fashion while hearing aids had not.



2010: THE MARKET WE KNOW IS BORN

In 2009, Canadian couture designer Izzy Camilleri founded IZ Adaptive after designing for a wheelchair user for a decade. It was the first adaptive line designed with genuine fashion ambition. In 2014, psychologist and disability rights advocate Dr. Danielle Sheypuk became the first model in a wheelchair to walk the New York Fashion Week runway - in five-inch heels! Sheypuk's message to the industry was: "People with disabilities are an untapped consumer market. We read the magazines, shop in stores, but nothing is ever pitched to us."



2016-2019: BIG BRANDS LAUNCH

Tommy Hilfiger in partnership with Runway of Dream Foundation launched a hugely successful adaptive collection. Two of the top six selling styles on tommy.com that quarter came from the adaptive line — proof of demand the industry had sidelined. Other retailers soon followed: Target, Zappos, Nike. Sinéad Burke brought fashion advocacy to the industry with a strong voice through Business of Fashion Voices. She also became the first visibly disabled person on the cover of British Vogue in 2019.



2020-2023: REFRAMING FASHION

British Vogue published 2023's *Reframing Fashion* by partnering with Burke's accessibility consulting Tilting the Lens. They featured 5 disabled cover stars: actor Selma Blair, models Ellie Goldstein and Aaron Rose Philip, and ASL performer Justina Miles. It was the first issue available in Braille. In 2021, Nike FlyEase a hands-free fastening system originally designed for a teenager with cerebral palsy were released. Two-time Paralympic gold fencing champion Bebe Vio was named a Dior brand ambassador. When about her scars, Vio told photographers: "Just make sure you don't cover them."



2024 - TODAY. STILL DREAMING

The Paris 2024 Paralympic Games opening ceremony was staged on the Champs-Élysées. French designer Louis-Gabriel Nouchi created over 700 costumes for the ceremony, working directly with disabled performers and wheelchair dancers. "When you have people in the fitting room crying because they've always dreamed of wearing something like this," he said, "it really pushes you to surpass yourself." Louis Vuitton's Pharrell Williams dressed performer Lucky Love. Primark launched a 49-piece adaptive collection.



**QUESTIONS?
FEEDBACK?
GET IN TOUCH**

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