

Lisa's Guide to Helping 21st Century Women Dress for a Regency Ball



The term "Regency" refers to the years between 1811 and 1820 when King George III of the United Kingdom was deemed unfit to rule and his son, later King George IV, was instated as his proxy. However, "Regency Era" is often applied to the time between 1795 and 1830. These extra years are sometimes called the "Extended Regency" because this whole period shared the same distinctive culture, fashion, architecture, politics and the continuing Napoleonic War.

Turbans and turban-like headdresses were very popular during this era and hide short hair. Any hair sticking out of the turban should be curled.

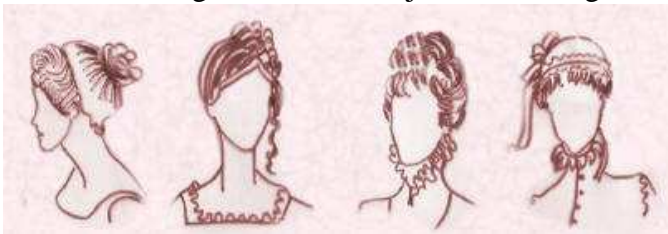


Hair

If you are unable to assemble much of a Regency wardrobe, you can still look the part with a period hairstyle.



Curly hair for both men and women was favored over straight hair. Individual curls were made with pomade (hair gel) and curling papers. Fortunately, we have curling irons to do the job. Think ringlets.



For very short hair, sweep it forward and curl.



Bandeaux of various widths were popular during the Regency. Take a scarf and wrap it around your head, then tuck the ends in or purchase a stretchy fabric headband.

Large plumes were the height of fashion for any headdress. A feather attached to a turban is so very attractive.



Medium length hair can be parted in the middle and curled. It was popular for the hair to look slightly disarranged.

Long hair should be parted in the middle with the bangs curled. The back can be twisted into a bun or put into a high pony tail and curled. Just don't let it look like a pony tail. Or do a French twist from the bottom and let it poof out at the top with curls. It can look slightly disheveled. Wisps and ringlets hanging at the nape of the neck, on the forehead and in front of the ears were very fashionable. Practice ahead of time.



The Minimum

If you wish to look like a gentlewoman but don't have a large dowry, all you need is an Empire waist gown and your own shoes.

1) **Gown** – Don't let the term "gown" scare you. Any and all one piece dresses were called gowns.

Empire style ball gowns have low cut (get over it), square bodices (sometimes V-neck) and short sleeves. The waist sits right under the breasts and the skirts drop straight to the floor. The material was usually gathered across the breast and the back of the gown. They often had a short train that was pinned up for dancing. Light colors, especially white, were preferred over dark and sheer, wispy or gauzy material was popular. The last foot or two of the skirt or the hem usually had some type of ornament or decoration. The bodice and sleeves often did too.

Most ball gowns would have been made of silk but today most Regency style dresses are made of cotton. Many of the pre-made Regency dresses available now are a compromise between day and evening wear. They have the short sleeves of the evening and the small printed designs of the day.

2) **Shoes** – Women's shoes during the Regency resembled ballet slippers, some with ties and some without. Wear your own "flats" with a small heel of no more than 1/2 inch or ballet slippers. No high heels please.



The Maximum

If you are married to the heir of a well-to-do family with money and time being no object, the following items should be added to the gown and shoes discussed previously.

Underpinnings – Every merchant or tailor who deals with period gowns will tell you that it won't look right or fit properly without the correct undergarments; they are referring to corsets and petticoats. However, the majority of modern women have no interest in paying for or wearing such things. The solution is a long slip and a demi-cup bra, also known as a balcony bra or balconette bra. The bra should be straight across the top of the cup. Make sure it fits and bring your dress with you when you purchase it.



Headdress – For a ball some kind of hair decoration, usually involving feathers, was worn. . Some of the choices are: ribbons, tiaras, turbans, bandeaux, veils or a combination of them. They can be purchased custom made at Austentation Regency Accessories: <http://www.austentation.com/>

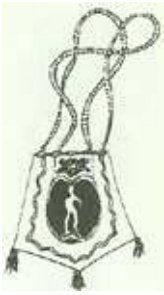


Gloves – White leather opera length gloves that extend above the elbow would be worn during at all times except while eating. The fashion was for them to look disheveled and droopy at the top. Today, leather opera gloves are difficult to find and very

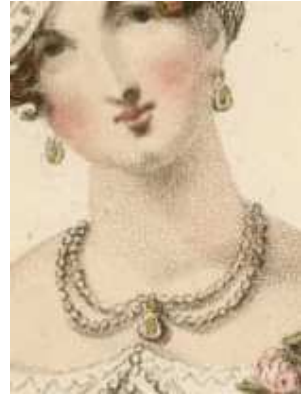
expensive. Try cotton instead. Please don't buy shiny satin, ask for a matte finish if purchasing gloves made of a synthetic material. No fingerless or lace gloves please. Your best bet for finding decent opera gloves is a second hand clothing store. Another option would be stores carrying bridal or prom items. But remember, no shiny satin!



Reticule – A small drawstring bag just large enough to hold your car keys and your gloves. They often didn't match the gowns however it can be made from the extra gown material if available. No crochet bags please.



Simple crosses of gem stones, gold, silver or pewter were popular and Jane Austen wore a small gemstone cross herself. The character of Eliza Bennett from the 1995 *Pride and Prejudice* mini-series wears a copy of it.



Necklaces made of small pearls with a large pearl as a pendant were very fashionable. Pearls were also used as trim for turbans, gowns and hairdresses.

If a simple solution for jewelry is needed, the brand "1928" (renamed 2028 in Macy's) found in many department stores looks like period jewelry.



Fans – Both men and women carried fans especially at a ball where it would be hot. They were made of wood, ivory or paper and could be simple or fancy. Sandalwood or paper fans can be purchased at stores specializing in Asian goods.

Jewelry – Necklaces, bracelets, earrings, brooches, pins and rings were worn. Brooches and pins were used to pin up sleeves, overdresses and trains. Rings were worn on the index finger. Bracelets can be worn over the gloves or above the gloves on the bicep. Earrings hung from the ears on wires. No posts please.



Cameos were also extremely popular for earrings, necklaces and pins. Authentic cameos are expensive but reproduction cameos are affordable and attractive. Please don't wear one on a black velvet choker!



Purchasing your wardrobe

By now you must realize that you will not find these items at the local mall. There are three main ways to acquire the clothing you will need.

1) **Buy the patterns and have a seamstress make them for you or make them yourself.** It's not possible to buy a single pattern to fit all your needs so be prepared to purchase several patterns.

Simplicity and Butterick have some serviceable patterns for this era.

* Butterick #B6630 or #B4890

*Simplicity # 4055.

A nice compromise between the commercial patterns and the patterns for re-enactors are the patterns from Sense and Sensibility:

www.sensibility.com

The following are historic pattern companies with Regency era patterns. These patterns will be more historically accurate than the patterns from the more commercial companies. Make sure the pattern is for the correct time period before buying it.

<http://www.jpryan.com/>

<http://www.folkwear.com/>

<http://www.wingeo.com/>

<http://rockinghorse-farm.com/>

<http://www.kanniskorner.com/>

Listed below are re-enactor supply companies that carry many of the above patterns and others. They also sell ready made clothing.

<http://www.smoke-fire.com/>

<http://www.jastown.com/>

<http://www.jamescountry.com>

<http://www.bradleycompanyofthefox.com>



2) **Buy them already made or custom made on the internet.**

<http://www.uppercanadianheritage.com/lindasearly/>
www.wemakehistory.com/EBoutique/EBoutique.htm
www.dragonflyformals.com

eBay can be a great source if you are patient and know how to use it. An entire Regency wardrobe can be purchased there. Search for “white opera gloves”, “Regency dress”, “Regency gown”, “reticule” and “cameo jewelry”. To have a gown custom made by an eBay merchant, search for “1812 Gown”.

3) **Go to a re-enactment and buy from the merchants there.**

The War of 1812 falls with the Regency period and many of its battles took place in New York, Ontario and surrounding areas. Most 1812 re-enactment events have “sutlers” or merchants who sell clothing.

These events are within a few hours drive. Arrive early to get the best selection.

Historic Merchants Market – The first Saturday in December in Hamilton, ON

www.historicmerchants.com/xmasgathering.html

1812 Grand Tactical – Battle re-enactment held in a different location every year. In 2007 it will be at Fort Niagara in Youngstown, NY.

<http://1812grandtactical.tripod.com/>

Living History Conference and Tradeshow –

Primarily War of 1812, held the first weekend in March in the Hamilton/Toronto region.

<http://www.livinghistoryconference.com/>

