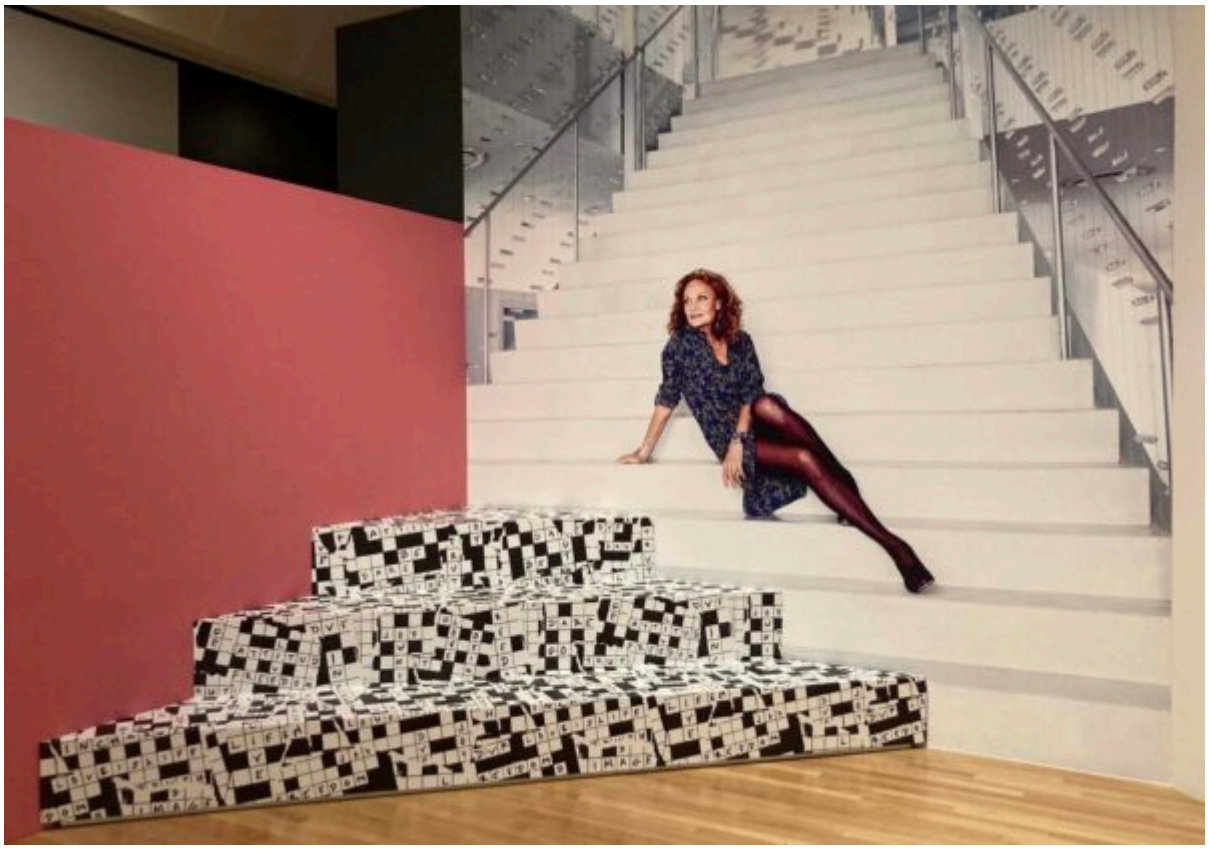
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Diane von Furstenberg at Skirball

Elisa Leonelli · Saturday, August 9th, 2025

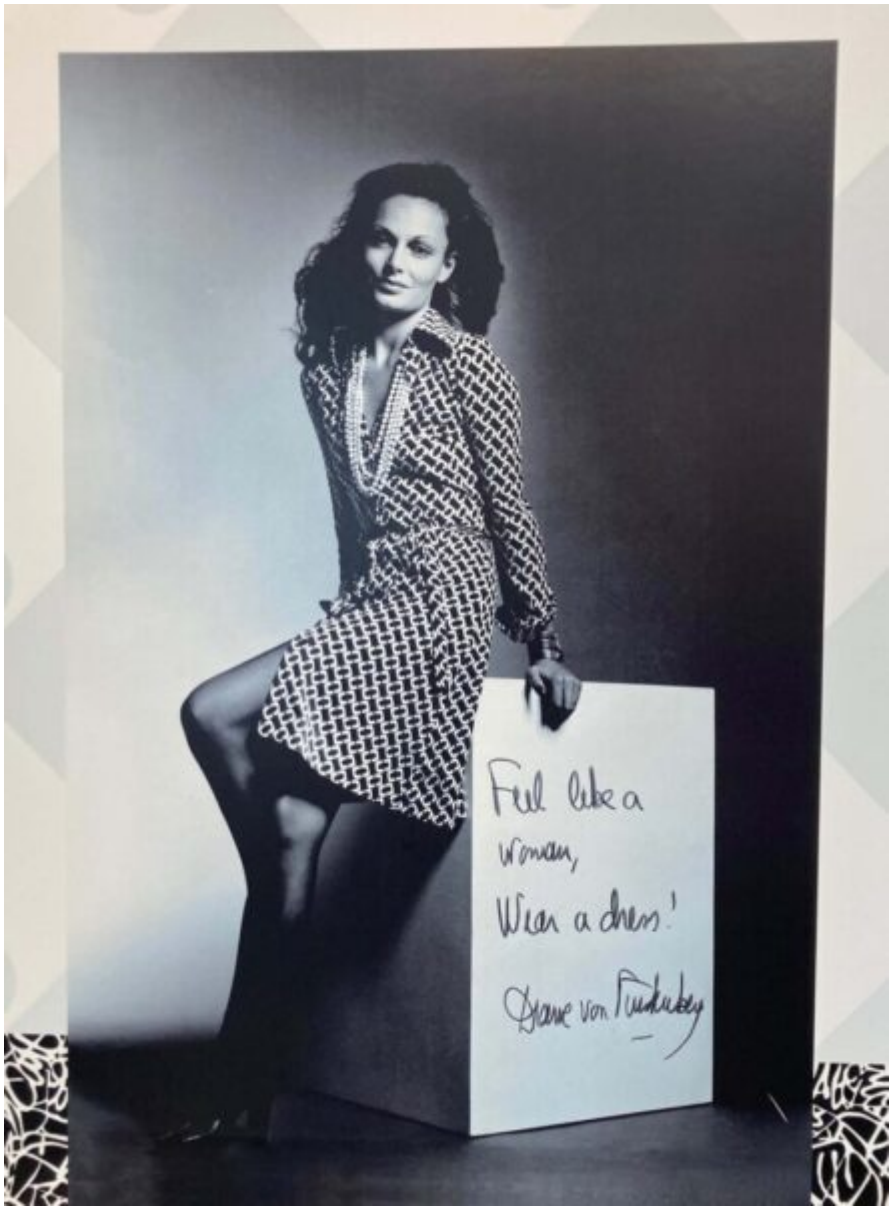


"Diane von Furstenberg: Woman Before Fashion" opened at Skirball Cultural Center October 17, 2024, but I had overlooked it until now.

Last week a friend suggested I watch the documentary *Diane von Furstenberg: Woman in Charge*, which I did, and I realized how unusual the life of this woman of my generation had been. I then explored the exhibit, that you still have time to see, if you hurry, because it closes August 31.

First, Diane Halfin is a European immigrant, born in Brussels, Belgium, and French speaking. Secondly, she is the daughter of a Holocaust survivor. Thirdly, she became a hugely successful businesswoman in New York in the 1970s and remains so to this day.

Gloria Steinem said: "DVF is an example to women everywhere, from women refugees who must expand language and culture, to women artists and business owners forging a path in a patriarchal world."



In the documentary, directed by a Muslim woman, Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, Diane gets to tell her life story, and claims to have done it all on her own, but she did get some help. In 1969 she married a German Roman Catholic prince, Egon von Furstenberg, son of Clara Agnelli, had two children with him, Alexander and Tatiana, then in 2001 she married movie mogul Barry Diller. Diller released "his" memoir, *Who Knew*, on May 20, 2025.

Diane wrote four books: *Diane Von Furstenberg's Book of Beauty: How to Become a More Attractive, Confident, and Sensual Woman* (1976); *Diane: A Signature Life* (1998); *The Woman I Wanted to Be* (2014); *Own It: The Secret to Life* (2021).

The Skirball exhibit celebrates the 50th anniversary of the iconic wrap dress. I would not go as far as claiming, as a title card says, that it “became a symbol of Women’s Liberation in the 1970s.”

Here’s a more apt description: “The wrap-around dress in printed jersey is slipped on like a long shirt. The panels cross over each other, two ribbons circle the waist and are tied in front to close it.”

By 1976 DVF had sold over one millions of low priced $86 wrap dresses landing Diane on the cover of Newsweek.

The designer created other styles through the years, she said “every season is a story. Fabric first, colors are the letters, prints are the words and the silhouette completes the sentence.”

“Life is a journey, enjoy the ride!” The Petite Valise “illustrates Diane’s passion for travel and discovering new places.”

“When you know how to pack, you know how to live.”

In 2019 at the Met Gala, Diane wore a dress inspired by the Statue of Liberty, having been named its “godmother” in 2016. She paid tribute to her mother Lily, who had joined the resistance in German occupied Belgium, was arrested by the Gestapo on May 6, 1944 and sent to Auschwitz. Watch on YouTube

Diane is still designing fashion lines, check out her website for the 2025 collection, available for sale online.

We conclude with these words from Diane von Furstenberg: “Once InCharge, we share our power to ADVOCATE. Take action on causes that matter, rally, speak up, organize, and make an impact.”

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