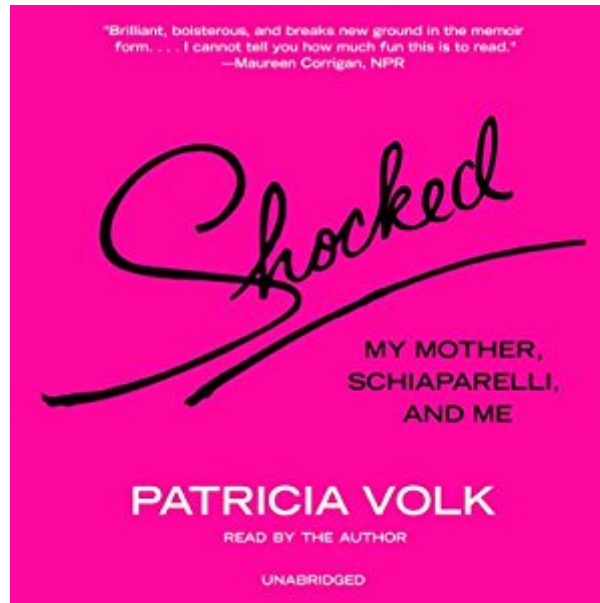


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# Shocked: My Mother, Schiaparelli, And Me



## Synopsis

From the acclaimed author of *Stuffed* comes an intimate memoir, written with charm and panache, that juxtaposes two fascinating lives - the iconoclastic designer Elsa Schiaparelli and the author's own mother - to explore how a girl fashions herself into a woman. Audrey Morgen Volk, an upper-middle-class New Yorker, was a great beauty and the polished hostess at her family's garment district restaurant. Elsa Schiaparelli - "Schiap" - the haute couture designer whose creations shocked the world, blurred the line between fashion and art, and believed that everything, even a button, has the potential to delight. Audrey's daughter Patricia read Schiap's autobiography, *Shocking Life*, at a tender age, and was transformed by it. These two women - volatile, opinionated, and brilliant, each in her own way - offered Patricia contrasting lessons about womanhood and personal style that allowed her to plot her own course. Moving seamlessly between the Volks' Manhattan and Florida milieu, and Schiap's life in Rome and Paris (among friends such as Dalí, Duchamp, and Picasso), *Shocking* weaves Audrey's traditional notions of domesticity with Schiaparelli's often outrageous ideas into a marvel-filled meditation on beauty and on being a daughter, sister, and mother, while demonstrating how a single book can change a life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

One of the most difficult things for a grown child is to understand their parents; the lives they've lived, the decisions they've made, and the emotional legacy they've left behind. I think it's particularly tough to understand the parent of the child's own gender. In Patricia Volk's new memoir,

"Shocked", she's trying to come to terms with her mother, a woman whose great beauty was life-long. Volk writes about her mother, Audrey, and uses French/Italian designer Elsa Schiaparelli - "Schiap" - as counter point. Volk's memoir would not appeal to most readers. If you use a Venn diagram, appreciative readers would be those in the middle circle of "readers interested in fashion and history" and "women trying for a lifetime to understand their beautiful and narcissistic mothers". Volk writes about her mother doing and saying fairly appalling things to her two daughters, Patricia and her older sister, Jo Ann, as they grew up. I've always thought that beautiful mothers should not have daughters; unless a woman has an unbreakable sense of self-esteem, often daughters are seen as a threat to the mother. Volk writes about her mother and says she understood her and remembers her with love. I believe her when she writes that; but it seems the truth might be mixed with some wishful thinking. Both Audrey Volk and Elsa Schiaparelli were famous in their own circles. Schiaparelli on the world stage and Volk on the upper West Side of New York City, where she worked with her husband, Cecil, in their restaurant. Audrey, while never wearing Schiap's fashion designs, was a long-time user of the perfume "Shocking". The perfume and its distinctive bottle were a yearly gift from Cecil to his beautiful wife.

"Shocked: My Mother, Schiaparelli and Me" (2014 publication; 295 pages plus 8 pages of color pictures) is another delightful memoir from author Patricia Volk, who previously brought us "Stuffed: Adventures of a Restaurant Family". This time around, the author looks back at her (complicated) relationship with her mother Audrey, and for good measure also throws in a comparative look as between her mother and Italian haute couture designer Elsa Schiaparelli (or "Schiap"). Several comments: first, I read a lot of memoirs (as it is my favorite type of book), and this is one of the more unusual ones I've come across in a while. Why, you may ask? Because the author's razor-sharp recollections on her mother are beautifully interwoven with a look at the rebellious fashion icon that was Schiaparelli in the pre-WW II era, and then, on top of that, each chapter is illustrated with wonderful pictures and drawings that illustrate the things we were just reading about (living room designed by Salvador Dali based on Mae West's face; Audrey's green velvet coat made and designed by Audrey's mom; Schiap in hostess pajamas; Audrey's bottle of "Shocking" cologne, etc. etc.). The intersections between Audrey and Schiap are many: "My mother wears "Shocking" perfume by Elsa Schiaparelli. And the book that defuses her, the book that transforms me, is Shocking Life by Elsa Schiaparelli", we learn early in the book. And later: "The major difference between Schiap's clothes and my mother's is. Schiap's are designed to draw attention to the clothes, not the face. Wearing her clothes is a performance, dressing as theater. An unattractive

woman and a beautiful woman become, for a moment, equals.

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