



My Drift

Title: Elizabeth Taylor

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Elizabeth Taylor

A handwritten signature of Elizabeth Taylor in black ink, featuring a large, stylized 'E' and 'T'.

General

Dame Elizabeth Rosemond Taylor (February 27, 1932 – March 23, 2011) was an American actress. She began her career as a child actress in the early 1940s and was one of the most popular stars of classical Hollywood cinema in the 1950s. She then became the world's highest-paid movie star in the 1960s, remaining a well-known public figure for the rest of her life. In 1999, the American Film Institute ranked her seventh on its greatest female screen legends list.

The "Dame" before Elizabeth Taylor's name comes from her UK honorific title, bestowed by Queen Elizabeth II in 2000, recognizing her significant contributions to film and charity. The title "Dame" is the female equivalent of a knight (who receives the title "Sir") and is given to women in recognition of their public service or achievements in fields like the arts, sciences, or philanthropy.

Born in London to socially prominent American parents, Taylor moved with her family to Los Angeles in 1939 at the age of 7. She made her acting debut with a minor role in the Universal Pictures film *There's One Born Every Minute* (1942), but the studio ended her contract after a year. She was then signed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and became a popular teen star after appearing in *National Velvet* (1944). She transitioned to mature roles in the 1950s, when she starred in the comedy *Father of the Bride* (1950) and received critical acclaim for her performance in the drama *A Place in the Sun* (1951). She starred in the historical adventure epic *Ivanhoe* (1952) with Robert Taylor and Joan Fontaine. Despite being one of MGM's most bankable stars, Taylor wished to end her career in the early 1950s. She resented the studio's control and disliked many of the films to which she was assigned.

She began receiving more enjoyable roles in the mid-1950s, beginning with the epic drama *Giant* (1956), and starring in several critically and commercially successful films in the following years. These included two film adaptations of plays by Tennessee Williams: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958), and *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959); Taylor won a Golden Globe for Best Actress for the latter. Although she disliked her role as a call girl in *Butterfield 8* (1960), she won the Academy Award for Best Actress for her performance. During the production of the film *Cleopatra* in 1961, Taylor and co-star Richard Burton began an extramarital affair, which caused a scandal. Despite public disapproval, they continued their relationship and were married in 1964. Dubbed "Liz and Dick" by the media, they starred in 11 films together, including *The V.I.P.s* (1963), *The Sandpiper* (1965), *The Taming of the Shrew* (1967), and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966). Taylor received the best reviews of her career for

Woolf, winning her second Academy Award and several other awards for her performance. She and Burton divorced in 1974 but reconciled soon after, remarrying in 1975. The second marriage ended in divorce in 1976.

Taylor's acting career began to decline in the late 1960s, although she continued starring in films until the mid-1970s, after which she focused on supporting the career of her sixth husband, United States Senator John Warner. In the 1980s, she acted in her first substantial stage roles and in several television films and series. She became the second celebrity to launch a perfume brand after Sophia Loren. Taylor was one of the first celebrities to take part in HIV/AIDS activism. She co-founded the American Foundation for AIDS Research in 1985 and the Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation in 1991. From the early 1990s until her death, she dedicated her time to philanthropy, for which she received several accolades, including the Presidential Citizens Medal in 2001.

Throughout her career, Taylor's personal life was the subject of constant media attention. She was married eight times to seven men, had 4 children, converted to Judaism, endured several serious illnesses, and led a jet set lifestyle, including assembling one of the most expensive private collections of jewelry in the world. After many years of ill health, Taylor died from congestive heart failure in 2011, at the age of 79.

Early Life

Elizabeth Rosemond Taylor was born on 27 February 1932, at Heathwood, her family's home at 8 Wildwood Road in Hampstead Garden Suburb, northwest London, England. She received dual British–American citizenship at birth as her parents, art dealer Francis Lenn Taylor (1897–1968) and stage actress Sara Sothern (1895–1994), were United States citizens, both originally from Arkansas City, Kansas.



Elizabeth with her Mother Sara Sothern



Young Elizabeth

They had moved to London in 1929 and opened an art gallery on Bond Street; their first child, a son named Howard (died 2020), was born the same year. The family lived in London during Taylor's childhood. Their social circle included artists such as Augustus John and Laura Knight and politicians such as Colonel Victor Cazalet. Cazalet was Taylor's unofficial godfather and an important influence on her early life. She was enrolled in Byron House School, a Montessori school in Highgate, and was raised according to the teachings of Christian Science, the religion of her mother.

In early 1939, the Taylors decided to return to the United States due to fear of impending war in Europe. United States ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy contacted her father, urging him to return to the US with his family. Sara and the children left first in April 1939 aboard the ocean liner SS Manhattan and moved in with Taylor's maternal grandfather in Pasadena, California. Francis stayed behind to close the London gallery and joined them in December. In early 1940, he opened a new gallery in Los Angeles. After briefly living in Pacific Palisades, Los Angeles, with the Chapman family, the Taylor family settled in Beverly Hills, California, where the two children were enrolled in Hawthorne School.

Acting career

1941–1949: Early roles and teenage stardom

Taylor's mother was initially opposed to Taylor appearing in films, but after the outbreak of war in Europe made return to London unlikely, she began to view the film industry as a way of assimilating to American society. Taylor auditioned for both Universal Pictures and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in early 1941. Both studios offered Taylor contracts, and Sara Taylor chose to accept Universal's offer.

Taylor began her contract in April 1941 and was cast in a small role in *There's One Born Every Minute* (1942). She did not receive other roles, and her contract was terminated after a year. Universal's casting director explained her dislike of Taylor, stating that "the kid has nothing ... her eyes are too old, she doesn't have the face of a child".

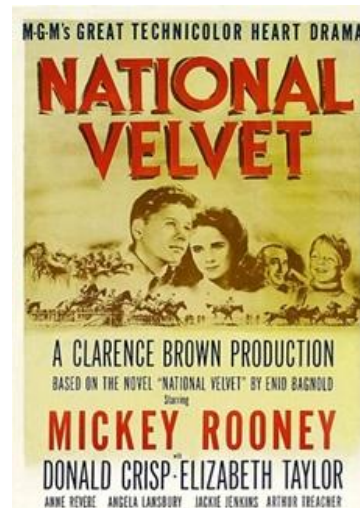
Taylor received another opportunity in late 1942, when her father's acquaintance, MGM producer Samuel Marx, arranged for her to audition for a minor role in *Lassie Come Home* (1943), which required a child actress with an English accent. After a trial contract of three months, she was given a

standard seven-year contract in January 1943. Following *Lassie*, she appeared in minor uncredited roles in two other films set in England – *Jane Eyre* (1943) playing Helen Burns, and *The White Cliffs of Dover* (1944).

Taylor was cast in her first starring role at the age of 12, when she was chosen to play a girl who wants to compete as a jockey in the exclusively male Grand National in *National Velvet*. She later called it "the most exciting film" of her career. Since 1937, MGM had been looking for a suitable actress with a British accent and the ability to ride horses. They decided on Taylor on the recommendation of *White Cliffs* director Clarence Brown, who knew she had the necessary skills. *National Velvet* became a box-office success upon its release on Christmas day, 1944.



Elizabeth on The Pie



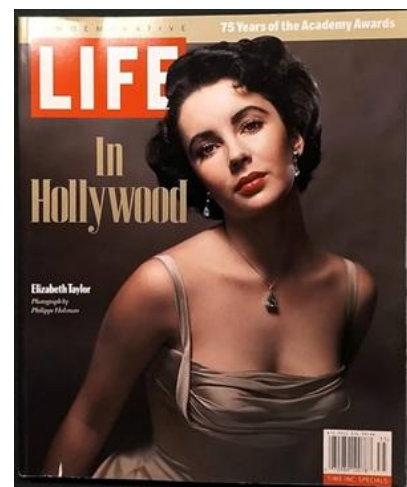
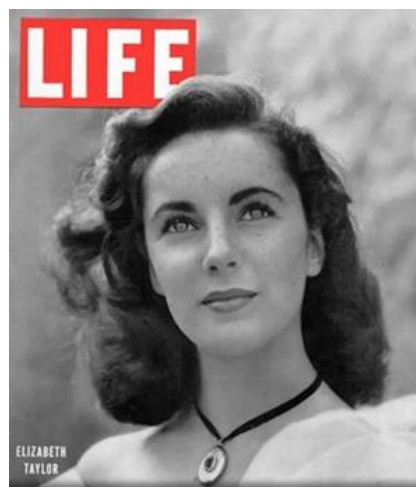
Taylor later stated that her childhood ended when she became a star, as MGM started to control every aspect of her life. She described the studio as a "big extended factory", where she was required to adhere to a strict daily schedule. Her days were spent attending school, and filming at the studio lot. In the evenings, Taylor took dancing and singing classes and practiced the following day's scenes. Following the success of *National Velvet*, MGM gave Taylor a new seven-year contract with a weekly salary of \$750. They cast her in a minor role in the third film of the *Lassie* series, *Courage of Lassie* (1946).

In the critically panned *Cynthia* (1947), Taylor portrayed a frail girl who defies her over-protective parents to go to the prom; in the period film *Life with Father* (1947), opposite William Powell and Irene Dunne, she portrayed the love interest of a stockbroker's son. *Life* magazine called her "Hollywood's most accomplished junior actress" for her two film roles that year.

They were followed by supporting roles as a teenaged "man-stealer" who seduces her peer's date to a high school dance in the musical **A Date with Judy (1948)**, and as a bride in the romantic comedy **Julia Misbehaves (1948)**. This became a commercial success, grossing over \$4 million in the box office. Taylor's last adolescent role was as Amy March in Mervyn LeRoy's **Little Women (1949)**, a box-office success. The same year, Time featured Taylor on its cover, and called her the leader among Hollywood's next generation of stars, "a jewel of great price, a true sapphire".



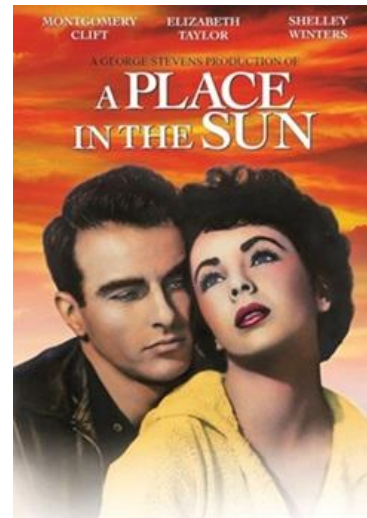
Lawford and Taylor



1950–1951: Transition to adult roles

Taylor made the transition to adult roles when she turned 18 in 1950. In her first mature role, the thriller **Conspirator (1949)**, she plays a woman who begins to suspect that her husband is a Soviet spy. Taylor had been only 16 at the time of its filming, but its release was delayed until March 1950, as MGM disliked it

and feared it could cause diplomatic problems. Taylor's second film of 1950 was the comedy **The Big Hangover (1950)**, co-starring Van Johnson. It was released in May. That same month, Taylor married hotel-chain heir Conrad "Nicky" Hilton Jr. in a highly publicized ceremony. The event was organized by MGM and used as part of the publicity campaign for Taylor's next film, Vincente Minnelli's comedy **Father of the Bride (1950)**, in which she appeared opposite Spencer Tracy and Joan Bennett as a bride preparing for her wedding. The film became a box-office success upon its release in June, grossing \$6 million worldwide (\$78,414,938 in 2024 dollars).



Taylor's next film release, George Stevens' **A Place in the Sun (1951)**, marked a departure from her earlier films. According to Taylor, it was the first film in which she had been asked to act, instead of simply being herself, and it brought her critical acclaim for the first time since National Velvet. Based on Theodore Dreiser's novel *An American Tragedy* (1925), it featured Taylor as a spoiled socialite who comes between a poor factory worker (Montgomery Clift) and his pregnant girlfriend (Shelley Winters). Stevens cast Taylor as she was "the only one ... who could create this illusion" of being "not so much a real girl as the girl on the candy-box cover, the beautiful girl in the yellow Cadillac convertible that every American boy sometime or other thinks he can marry."

1952–1955: Continued success at MGM

Taylor next starred in the romantic comedy **Love Is Better Than Ever (1952)**. It was said that MGM cast her in the "B-picture" as a reprimand for divorcing Hilton in January 1951 after only eight months of marriage, which had caused a public scandal that reflected negatively on her.



Taylor 1952

After completing *Love Is Better Than Ever*, Taylor was sent to Britain to take part in the historical epic **Ivanhoe (1952)**, which was one of the most expensive projects in the studio's history. She was not happy about the project, finding the story superficial and her role as Rebecca too small. Regardless, *Ivanhoe* became one of MGM's biggest commercial successes, earning \$11 million in worldwide rentals.

Taylor's last film made under her old contract with MGM was **The Girl Who Had Everything (1953)**, a remake of the pre-code drama *A Free Soul* (1931). Despite her grievances with the studio, Taylor signed a new seven-year contract with MGM in the summer of 1952. Although she wanted more interesting roles, the decisive factor in continuing with the studio was her financial need; she had recently married British actor Michael Wilding and was pregnant with her first child. In addition to granting her a weekly salary of \$4,700 (\$55,237 in 2024 dollars), MGM agreed to give the couple a loan for a house and signed her husband for a three-year contract. Due to her financial dependency, the studio now had even more control over her than previously.

Taylor's first two films made under her new contract were released ten days apart in early **1954**. The first was **Rhapsody**, a romantic film starring her as a woman caught in a love triangle with two musicians. The second was **Elephant Walk**, a drama in which she played a British woman struggling to adapt to life on her husband's tea plantation in Ceylon. She had been loaned to Paramount Pictures for the film after its original star, Vivien Leigh, fell ill. In the fall, Taylor starred in two more film releases. *Beau Brummell* was a Regency era period film, another project in which she was cast against her will. Taylor disliked historical films in general, as their elaborate costumes and makeup required her to wake up earlier than usual to prepare. She later said that she gave one of the worst performances of her career in *Beau Brummell*. The

second film was Richard Brooks' **The Last Time I Saw Paris**, based on F. Scott Fitzgerald's short story. Although she had wanted to be cast in *The Barefoot Contessa* (1954) instead, Taylor liked the Brooks film and later stated that it "convinced me I wanted to be an actress instead of yawning my way through parts." While *The Last Time I Saw Paris* was not as profitable as many other MGM films, it garnered positive reviews. Taylor became pregnant again during the production and had to agree to add another year to her contract to make up for the period spent on maternity leave.



Taylor 1955

1956–1960: Critical acclaim

By the mid-1950s, the American film industry was beginning to face serious competition from television, which resulted in studios producing fewer films, and focusing instead on their quality. The change benefited Taylor, who finally found more challenging roles after several years of career disappointment. After lobbying director George Stevens, she won the female lead role in **Giant** (1956), an epic drama about a ranching dynasty, which co-starred Rock Hudson and James Dean.



Liz and Rock

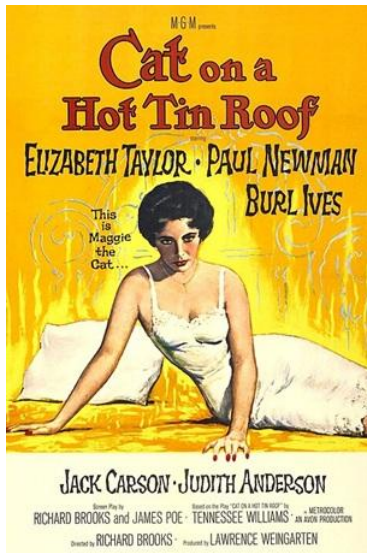


Liz and James Dean

Its filming in Marfa, Texas, was a difficult experience for Taylor, as she clashed with Stevens, who wanted to break her will to make her easier to direct, and was often ill, resulting in delays. To further complicate the production, Dean died in a car accident only days after completing filming; the grieving Taylor still had to film reaction shots to their joint scenes. When *Giant* was released a year later, it became a box-office success and was widely praised by critics. Although not nominated for an Academy Award like her co-stars, Taylor garnered positive reviews for her performance, with *Variety* calling it "surprisingly clever", and *The Manchester Guardian* lauding her acting as "an astonishing revelation of unsuspected gifts." It named her one of the film's strongest assets.

MGM reunited Taylor with Montgomery Clift in *Raintree County* (1957), a Civil War drama which it hoped would replicate the success of *Gone with the Wind* (1939). Taylor found her role as a mentally disturbed Southern belle fascinating but overall disliked the film. Although the film failed to become the type of success MGM had planned, Taylor was nominated for the first time for an Academy Award for Best Actress for her performance.

Taylor considered her next performance as Maggie the Cat in the screen adaptation of the Tennessee Williams play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958) a career "high point." But it coincided with one of the most difficult periods in her personal life. After completing *Raintree County*, she had divorced Wilding and married producer Mike Todd. She had completed only two weeks of filming in March 1958, when Todd was killed in a plane crash. Although she was devastated, pressure from the studio and the knowledge that Todd had large debts led Taylor to return to work only three weeks later. She later said that "in a way ... [she] became Maggie", and that acting "was the only time I could function" in the weeks after Todd's death.



Taylor and Newman

During the production, Taylor's personal life drew more attention when she began an affair with singer Eddie Fisher, whose marriage to actress Debbie Reynolds had been idealized by the media as the union of "America's sweethearts." The affair – and Fisher's subsequent divorce – changed Taylor's public image from a grieving widow to a "homewrecker". MGM used the scandal to its advantage by featuring an image of Taylor posing on a bed in a slip in the film's promotional posters. Cat grossed \$10 million in American cinemas alone and made Taylor the year's second-most profitable star. She received positive reviews for her performance, with Bosley Crowther of The New York Times calling her "terrific", and Variety praising her for "a well-accented, perceptive interpretation." Taylor was nominated for an Academy Award.



Liz in Swimming Suit

Taylor's next film, Joseph L. Mankiewicz's **Suddenly, Last Summer (1959)**, was another Tennessee Williams starring Montgomery Clift and Katharine Hepburn. The independent production earned Taylor \$500,000 for playing the role of a severely traumatized patient in a mental institution. Although the film was a drama about mental illness, childhood traumas, and homosexuality, it was again promoted with Taylor's sex appeal; both its trailer and poster featured her in a white swimsuit. The strategy worked, as the film was a financial success. Taylor received her third Academy Award nomination and her first Golden Globe for Best Actress for her performance.

By 1959, Taylor owed one more film for MGM, which it decided should be **Butterfield 8 (1960)**, a drama about a high-class call girl, in an adaptation of a John O'Hara 1935 novel of the same name. The studio correctly calculated that Taylor's public image would make it easy for audiences to associate her with the role. She hated the film for the same reason, but had no choice in the matter, although the studio agreed to her demands of filming in New York and casting Eddie Fisher in a sympathetic role. As predicted, *Butterfield 8* was a major commercial success, grossing \$18 million in world rentals. Crowther wrote that Taylor "looks like a million dollars, in mink or in negligée", while *Variety* stated that she gives "a torrid, stinging portrayal with one or two brilliantly executed passages within." Taylor won her first Academy Award for Best Actress for her performance.



1961–1967: Cleopatra and other collaborations with Richard Burton

Although I liked Elizabeth Taylor, the only Taylor film I remember seeing in a movie theater was Cleopatra. I thought it was a great movie! Over the years I have seen several of her films on TV.

After completing her MGM contract, Taylor starred in 20th Century-Fox's **Cleopatra (1963)**. This historical epic made her more famous than ever before. She became the first movie star to be paid \$1 million for a role; Fox also granted her 10% of the film's gross profits, as well as shooting the film in Todd-AO, a widescreen format for which she had inherited the rights from Mike Todd. The film's production – characterized by costly sets and costumes, constant delays, and a scandal caused by Taylor's extramarital affair with her co-star Richard Burton – was closely followed by the media, with Life proclaiming it the "Most Talked About Movie Ever Made." Filming began in England in 1960 but had to be halted several times because of bad weather and Taylor's ill health. In March 1961, she developed nearly fatal pneumonia, which necessitated a tracheotomy; one news agency erroneously reported that she had died. Once she had recovered, Fox discarded the already filmed material, and moved the production to Rome, changing its director to Joseph Mankiewicz, and the actor playing Mark Antony to Burton. Filming was finally completed in July 1962. The film's final cost was \$62 million (equivalent to \$644 million in 2024), making it the most expensive film ever made up to that point.



Cleopatra became the biggest box-office success of 1963 in the United States; the film grossed \$15.7 million at the box office (equivalent to \$161 million in 2024). Regardless, it took several years for the film to earn back its production costs, which drove Fox near to bankruptcy. The studio publicly blamed Taylor for the production's troubles and unsuccessfully sued Burton and Taylor for allegedly damaging the film's commercial prospects with their behavior. The film's reviews were mixed to negative, with critics finding Taylor overweight and her voice too thin and unfavorably comparing her with her classically trained British co-stars. In retrospect, Taylor called Cleopatra a "low point" in her career and said that the studio had cut out the scenes which she felt provided the "core of the characterization."

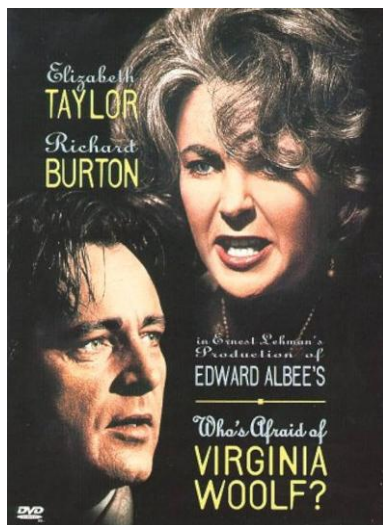
Taylor intended to follow Cleopatra by headlining an all-star cast in Fox's black comedy *What a Way to Go!* (1964), but negotiations fell through, and Shirley MacLaine was cast instead. In the meantime, film producers were eager to profit from the scandal surrounding Taylor and Burton, and they next starred together in Anthony Asquith's *The V.I.P.s* (1963), which mirrored the headlines about them. Taylor played a famous model attempting to leave her husband for a lover, and Burton her estranged millionaire husband. Released soon after *Cleopatra*, it became a box-office success. Taylor was also paid \$500,000 (equivalent to \$5.14 million in 2024) to appear in a CBS television special, *Elizabeth Taylor in London*, in which she visited the city's landmarks and recited passages from the works of famous British writers.



Burton and Taylor Wedding

After completing *The V.I.P.s*, Taylor took a two-year hiatus from films, during which she and Burton divorced their spouses and married each other. The supercouple continued starring together in films in the mid-1960s, earning a combined \$88 million over the next decade; Burton once stated, "They say we generate more business activity than one of the smaller African nations." Biographer Alexander Walker compared these films to "illustrated gossip columns", as their film roles often reflected their public personae, while film historian Alexander Doty has noted that the majority of Taylor's films during this period seemed to "conform to, and reinforce, the image of an indulgent, raucous, immoral, and appetitive. Taylor and Burton's first joint project following her hiatus was Vincente Minnelli's romantic drama *The Sandpiper* (1965), about an illicit love affair between a bohemian artist and a married clergyman in Big Sur, California. Its reviews were largely negative, but it grossed a successful \$14 million in the box office (equivalent to \$140 million in 2024).

Their next project, **Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1966)**, an adaptation of a play of the same name by Edward Albee, featured the most critically acclaimed performance of Taylor's career. She and Burton starred as Martha and George, a middle-aged couple going through a marital crisis. In order to convincingly play 50-year-old Martha, Taylor gained weight, wore a wig, and used makeup to make herself look older and tired – in stark contrast to her public image as a glamorous film star. At Taylor's suggestion, theatre director Mike Nichols was hired to direct the project, despite his lack of experience with film. The production differed from anything she had done previously, as Nichols wanted to thoroughly rehearse the play before beginning filming. Woolf was considered ground-breaking for its adult themes and uncensored language and opened to "glorious" reviews. Variety wrote that Taylor's "characterization is at once sensual, spiteful, cynical, pitiable, loathsome, lustful, and tender." Stanley Kauffmann of The New York Times stated that she "does the best work of her career, sustained and urgent." The film also became one of the biggest commercial successes of the year. Taylor received her second Academy Award, National Board of Review, and New York City Film Critics Circle awards for her performance.



In 1966, Taylor and Burton performed Doctor Faustus for a week in Oxford to benefit the Oxford University Dramatic Society; he starred, and she appeared in her first stage role as Helen of Troy, a part which required no speaking. Although it received generally negative reviews, Burton produced it as a film, **Doctor Faustus (1967)**, with the same cast. It was also panned by critics and grossed only \$600,000 in the box office (equivalent to \$5.66 million in 2024). Taylor and Burton's next project, Franco Zeffirelli's **The Taming of the Shrew (1967)**, which they also co-produced, was more successful. It posed another

challenge for Taylor, as she was the only actor in the project with no previous experience of performing Shakespeare; Zeffirelli later stated that this made her performance interesting, as she "invented the part from scratch." Critics found the play to be fitting material for the couple, and the film became a box-office success by grossing \$12 million (equivalent to \$113.16 million in 2024).

Taylor's third film released in 1967, John Huston's **Reflections in a Golden Eye**, was her first without Burton since *Cleopatra*. Based on a novel of the same name by Carson McCullers, it was a drama about a repressed gay military officer and his unfaithful wife. It was originally slated to co-star Taylor's old friend Montgomery Clift, whose career had been in decline for several years owing to his substance abuse problems. Determined to secure his involvement in the project, Taylor even offered to pay for his insurance. But Clift died from a heart attack before filming began; he was replaced in the role by Marlon Brando. *Reflections* was a critical and commercial failure at the time of its release. Taylor and Burton's last film of the year was the adaptation of Graham Greene's novel, **The Comedians**, which received mixed reviews and was a box-office disappointment.

1968–1979: Career decline

Taylor's career was in decline by the late 1960s. She had gained weight, was in her late 30s and did not fit in with New Hollywood stars such as Jane Fonda and Julie Christie. After several years of nearly constant media attention, the public was tiring of Burton and her and criticized their jet set lifestyle. In 1968, Taylor starred in two films directed by Joseph Losey – **Boom!** and **Secret Ceremony** – both of which were critical and commercial failures. The former, based on Tennessee Williams' *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*, features her as an ageing, serial-marrying millionaire, and Burton as a younger man who turns up on the Mediterranean island on which she has retired. *Secret Ceremony* is a psychological drama that also stars Mia Farrow and Robert Mitchum. Taylor's third film with George Stevens, **The Only Game in Town** (1970), in which she played a Las Vegas showgirl who has an affair with a compulsive gambler, played by Warren Beatty, was unsuccessful.

The three **1972 films** in which Taylor acted were somewhat more successful. **X Y & Zee**, which portrayed Michael Caine and her as a troubled married couple, won her the David di Donatello for Best Foreign Actress. She appeared with Burton in the adaptation of Dylan Thomas's **Under Milk Wood**; although her role was small, the producers decided to give her top-billing to profit from her

fame. Her third film role that year was playing a blonde diner waitress in Peter Ustinov's Faust parody **Hammersmith Is Out**, her tenth collaboration with Burton. Although it was overall not successful, Taylor received some good reviews, with Vincent Canby of The New York Times writing that she has "a certain vulgar, ratty charm", and Roger Ebert of the Chicago Sun-Times saying, "The spectacle of Elizabeth Taylor growing older and more beautiful continues to amaze the population." Her performance won the Silver Bear for Best Actress at the Berlin Film Festival.

Taylor and Burton's last film together was the Harlech Television film **Divorce His, Divorce Hers (1973)**, fittingly named as they divorced the following year. Her other films released in 1973 were the British thriller **Night Watch (1973)** and the American drama **Ash Wednesday (1973)**. For the latter, in which she starred as a woman who undergoes multiple plastic surgeries in an attempt to save her marriage, she received a Golden Globe nomination. Her only film released in 1974, the Italian Muriel Spark adaptation **The Driver's Seat (1974)**, was a failure.

Taylor took fewer roles after the mid-1970s and focused on supporting the career of her sixth husband, Republican politician John Warner, a US senator. In 1976, she participated in the Soviet-American fantasy film **The Blue Bird (1976)**, a critical and box-office failure, and had a small role in the television film **Victory at Entebbe (1976)**. In 1977, she sang in the critically panned film adaptation of Stephen Sondheim's musical **A Little Night Music (1977)**.

1980–2007: Stage and television roles; retirement

After a period of semi-retirement from films, Taylor starred in **The Mirror Crack'd (1980)**, adapted from an Agatha Christie mystery novel and featuring an ensemble cast of actors from the studio era, such as Angela Lansbury, Kim Novak, Rock Hudson, and Tony Curtis.



Wanting to challenge herself, she took on her first substantial stage role, playing Regina Giddens in a Broadway production of Lillian Hellman's **The Little Foxes**. Instead of portraying Giddens in negative light, as had often been the case in previous productions, Taylor's idea was to show her as a victim of circumstance, explaining, "She's a killer, but she's saying, 'Sorry fellas, you put me in this position'."

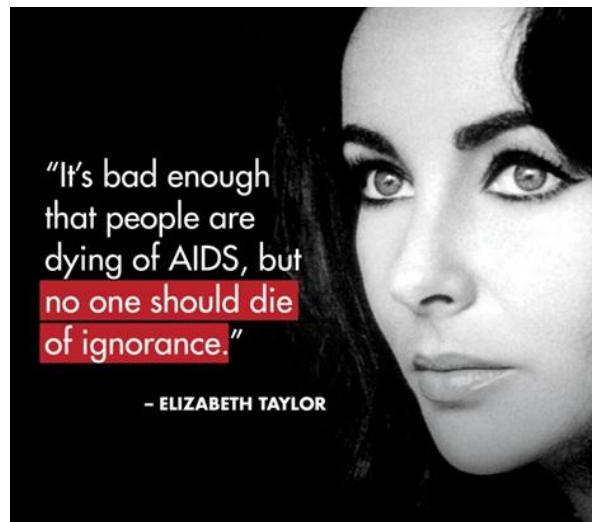


The production premiered in May **1981** and had a sold-out six-month run despite mixed reviews. Frank Rich of The New York Times wrote that Taylor's performance as "Regina Giddens, that malignant Southern bitch-goddess ... begins gingerly, soon gathers steam, and then explodes into a black and thunderous storm that may just knock you out of your seat", while Dan Sullivan of the Los Angeles Times stated, "Taylor presents a possible Regina Giddens, as seen through the persona of Elizabeth Taylor. There's some acting in it, as well as some personal display." She appeared as evil socialite Helena Cassadine in the day-time soap opera General Hospital in November 1981. The following year, she continued performing The Little Foxes in London's West End but received largely negative reviews from the British press.

Encouraged by the success of The Little Foxes, Taylor and producer Zev Buffman founded the Elizabeth Taylor Repertory Company. Its first and only production was a revival of Noël Coward's comedy Private Lives, starring Taylor and Burton. It premiered in Boston in early 1983, and although commercially successful, received generally negative reviews, with critics noting that both stars were in noticeably poor health – Taylor admitted herself to a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center after the play's run ended, and Burton died the following year. After the failure of Private Lives, Taylor dissolved her theatre company. Her only other project that year was the television film Between Friends.

From the mid-1980s, Taylor acted mostly in television productions. She made cameos in the soap operas *Hotel* and *All My Children* in 1984 and played a brothel keeper in the historical mini-series *North and South* in 1985. She also starred in several television films, playing gossip columnist Louella Parsons in *Malice in Wonderland* (1985), a fading movie star in the drama *There Must Be a Pony* (1986), and a character based on Poker Alice in the eponymous Western (1987). She re-united with director Franco Zeffirelli to appear in his French-Italian biopic *Young Toscanini* (1988) and had the last starring role of her career in a television adaptation of *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1989), her fourth Tennessee Williams play. During this time, she also began receiving honorary awards for her career – the Cecil B. DeMille Award in 1985, and the Film Society of Lincoln Center's Chaplin Award in 1986.

In the 1990s, Taylor focused her time on HIV/AIDS activism. Her few acting roles included characters in the animated series *Captain Planet* and the *Planeteers* (1992) and *The Simpsons* (1992, 1993), and cameos in four CBS series – *The Nanny*, *Can't Hurry Love*, *Murphy Brown*, and *High Society* – all airing on February 26, 1996, to promote her new fragrance.



Her last theatrically released film was the critically panned, but commercially successful, *The Flintstones* (1994), in which she played Pearl Slaghoople in a brief supporting role. Taylor received American and British honors for her career: the AFI Life Achievement Award in 1993, the Screen Actors Guild honorary award in 1997, and a BAFTA Fellowship in 1999. In 2000, she was appointed a Dame Commander in the chivalric Order of the British Empire in the millennium New Year Honors List by Queen Elizabeth II. After supporting roles in the television film *These Old Broads* (2001) and in the animated sitcom *God, the Devil and Bob* (2001), Taylor announced that she was retiring from acting to devote her time to philanthropy. She gave one last public performance in 2007, when she performed the play *Love Letters* at an AIDS benefit at the Paramount studios with James Earl Jones.

Personal Life

Throughout her adult years, Taylor's personal life, especially her eight marriages (two to the same man), drew a large amount of media attention and public disapproval. Whether she liked it or not ... marriage is the matrix of the myth that began surrounding Elizabeth Taylor from when she was sixteen. In 1948, MGM arranged for her to date American football champion Glenn Davis and she announced plans for them to marry once he returned from Korea. Then she changed her mind. The following year, Taylor was briefly engaged to William Pawley Jr., son of US ambassador William D. Pawley. Film tycoon Howard Hughes also wanted to marry her and offered to pay her parents a six-figure sum of money if she were to become his wife. Taylor declined the offer, but was otherwise eager to marry young, as her "rather puritanical upbringing and beliefs" made her believe that "love was synonymous with marriage." Taylor later described herself as being "emotionally immature" during this time due to her sheltered childhood and believed that she could gain independence from her parents and MGM through marriage.

Husbands list

Elizabeth Taylor's husbands, in order, were:

Conrad "Nicky" Hilton Jr.: Married in 1950, divorced in 1951.

Michael Wilding: Married in 1952, divorced in 1957.

Mike Todd: Married in 1957, he died in a plane crash in 1958.

Eddie Fisher: Married in 1959, divorced in 1964.

Richard Burton: Married in 1964, divorced in 1974.

Richard Burton (again): Married in 1975, divorced in 1976.

John Warner: Married in 1976, divorced in 1982.

Larry Fortensky: Married in 1991, divorced in 1996.



Other ventures

HIV/AIDS activism

Taylor was one of the first celebrities to participate in HIV/AIDS activism and helped to raise more than \$270 million for the cause since the mid-1980s. She began her philanthropic work after becoming frustrated with the fact that very little was being done to combat the disease despite the media attention. She later explained for Vanity Fair that she "decided that with my name, I could open certain doors, that I was a commodity in myself – and I'm not talking as an actress. I could take the fame I'd resented and tried to get away from for so many years – but you can never get away from it – and use it to do some good. I wanted to retire, but the tabloids wouldn't let me. So, I thought: If you're going to screw me over, I'll use you."



Taylor testifying before the Senate and House

Taylor testified before the Senate and House for the Ryan White Care Act in 1986, 1990, and 1992. She persuaded President Ronald Reagan to acknowledge the disease for the first time in a speech in 1987 and publicly criticized presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton for lack of interest in combatting the disease. Taylor also founded the Elizabeth Taylor Medical Center to offer free HIV/AIDS testing and care at the Whitman-Walker Clinic in Washington, DC, and the Elizabeth Taylor Endowment Fund for the UCLA Clinical AIDS Research and Education Center in Los Angeles.

Fragrance and jewelry brands

Taylor created a collection of fragrances whose unprecedented success helped establish the trend of celebrity-branded perfumes in later years. In

collaboration with Elizabeth Arden, Inc., she began by launching two best-selling perfumes – Passion in 1987, and White Diamonds in 1991.



Taylor personally supervised the creation and production of each of the 11 fragrances marketed in her name. According to biographers Sam Kashner and Nancy Schoenberger, she earned more money through the fragrance collection than during her entire acting career, and upon her death, the British newspaper The Guardian estimated that the majority of her estimated \$600 million-\$1 billion estate consisted of revenue from fragrances. In 2005, Taylor also founded a jewelry company, House of Taylor, in collaboration with Kathy Ireland.

Illness and death

Taylor struggled with health problems for most of her life. She was born with scoliosis and broke her back while filming National Velvet in 1944. The fracture went undetected for several years, although it caused her chronic back problems. In 1956, she underwent an operation in which some of her spinal discs were removed and replaced with donated bone. Taylor was also prone to other illnesses and injuries, which often necessitated surgery; in 1961, she survived a near-fatal bout of pneumonia that required a tracheotomy. She was treated for the pneumonia with bacteriophage.

In 1968 she underwent an emergency hysterectomy, which exacerbated her back problems and contributed to hip problems. Perhaps self-medicating, she was addicted to alcohol and prescription pain killers and tranquilizers. She was treated at the Betty Ford Center for seven weeks from December 1983 to January 1984, becoming the first celebrity to openly admit herself to the clinic.

She relapsed later in the decade and entered rehabilitation again in 1988. Taylor had gained weight by the 1970s, especially after her marriage to Senator John Warner, and published a diet book about her experiences, Elizabeth Takes Off (1988). Taylor was a heavy smoker until she experienced a severe bout of pneumonia in 1990. According to her ex-cousin-in-law Sandra Souza, Taylor was still smoking menthol cigarettes in 1995.

Taylor's health increasingly declined during the last two decades of her life and she rarely attended public events after 1996. Taylor had serious bouts of pneumonia in 1990 and 2000, two hip replacement surgeries in the mid-1990s, a surgery for a benign brain tumor in 1997, and successful treatment for skin cancer in 2002. She used a wheelchair due to her back problems and was diagnosed with congestive heart failure in 2004. She died of the illness aged 79 on March 23, 2011, at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, six weeks after being hospitalized. Her funeral took place the following day at the Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California. The service was a private Jewish ceremony presided by Rabbi Jerome Cutler. At Taylor's request, the ceremony began 15 minutes behind schedule, as, according to her representative, "She even wanted to be late for her own funeral." She was entombed in the cemetery's Great Mausoleum.



Taylor's star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in the days following her death in 2011

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