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CHRISTIAN DIOR



It needed all the deep affection Jeanne Lanvin felt for Lucien Lelong for her to agree to the proposition. The famous film « Les Enfants du Paradis », with Arletty and Casarès, was being made or rather was about to be made. The sketches for the costumes had been designed by one of Lelong's designers and—I no longer remember for what reason—the producer had asked Lanvin to make the models.

This is how it came about that the artist who had done the sketches came to see me in my office. Of average height, very courteous in manner, with a calm expression but eyes a little anxious, he immediately aroused one's liking... Although shy, he was never embarrassingly so. He spoke in a calm, unobtrusive voice. A remarkable education and twenty years of persistent bad luck had left their mark on him. At first sight one would have taken him for an agricultural expert rather than a couturier. And yet this was the man who, a mere two years later, was to hit the headlines, the one whose signature with the symbolic Christian cross was to be as much sought after as the most precious gems.

Time passed, the film was forgotten, rumours began to circulate, grew stronger and finally exploded onto the front pages of newspapers all over the world.

And one day, on the famous grey sofa in the brand new house on Avenue Montaigne, we attended the First Showing of the House of Dior.

Lelong was thoughtful, both preoccupied and proud. One of his designers, Pierre Balmain, had already launched out on his own. Now it was Dior's turn. The spotlights went on. The first dress was announced. And the mannequins made their breathtaking entrance, pirouetting and twirling like dancers, their petticoats flaring out over the knees of the spectators in the front row. It was a revelation from the word go. Carmel Snow, Brunhoff, Christian Bérard opened their eyes wide in surprise and only put down their pencils and programmes to join in the thunderous applause.

At the end of the showing, near the door leading into the mannequins' dressing rooms, Christian Dior, flushed with emotion, tears in his eyes, thanked everybody and received the universal acclaim. And then came the triumphal tour. Dior in New York, Dior in Japan, Dior in London, Dior in Caracas, Dior all over the world, on the stage, in drawing rooms, at royal courts. Dresses, sheaths, corsets, stockings, hats, jewellery, flowers, accessories, shoes—he tried his hand at everything, and everything was crowned with success. Boussac's friends were amazed to discover a businessman in one they had considered to be above all a refined aesthete. The designer, the picture gallery owner, the regular client of the fashionable cabaret «Le Bœuf sur le Toit», revealed himself as one of the big pioneers of the day. Boussac had thought first of all of patching up an old house in the Rue St. Florentin, but after talking with Dior he decided to build a brand new fashion house in the height of luxury. And here was his foal becoming more famous than the thoroughbreds in his racing stables.

* * *

There is no point in dwelling on the tragedy of it. Some lives are so brilliant that they seem to burn themselves out. After Robert Piguet, after Jacques Fath, Christian Dior has left us, struck down in a few moments. It is a great loss for Parisian couture. And it is a cruel loss for the men and women who worked at his side. One has only to hear with what tender affection his colleagues continue to talk of him. He was admired—naturally—but he was loved too. Beneath the veil of shyness that enveloped him, his love of humanity shone through.

* * *

He was among the first to combine couture for the elite with elegant ready-to-wear clothing for the many. He was one of the first to open up a boutique, to bring within the reach of European women, and American women, smart, simple clothes of impeccable taste, bearing the hallmark of Paris. He was woman's architect. He took the feminine body, changed it, reshaped it, created new forms for it which even when they seemed exaggerated and unwearable were, within a few weeks, adopted by all.

* * *

Take a designer of talent, give him a rich artistic and literary background, a keen awareness of the world, a feeling for colours, a knowledge of cut, an intuition

about the future, and you will have bestowed on him almost all the gifts Christian Dior possessed. But you will not have a Christian Dior. Because for a similar success to be repeated it requires the intervention of the gods to raise their chosen one to Olympian stature.

And the gods, by definition, or by habit, have a tendency to be indifferent. Unless perhaps it is that nowadays man no longer interests them very much.

GALA



Actualités-Mondial-Photo

THE HOUSE OF DIOR CARRIES ON

In this photograph can be seen those appointed by Christian Dior to succeed him :
From left to right :

- Madame Raymonde Zehnacker, who worked with Lucien Lelong for 22 years before following Christian Dior to Avenue Montaigne. She runs the firm.
- Yves Saint-Laurent, Christian Dior's pupil and favourite designer.
- Madame Marguerite Carré, the gifted fitter who helped Dior develop his famous technique.
- Madame Bricard, who was a sort of artistic adviser to Dior and will continue to perform the same role.