

While
we never
made it
our sole
mission
to expose

all those mystifying names behind the labels, it's the fashion designers who've been the mainstays of Fashion Television, and at the heart and soul of it all. And while some may beg to differ, in our eyes, the cream of the crop were always true artists. Their crystal-clear vision, inspired aesthetic, passion for perfection, desire to communicate and downright tenacity all made the world a more beautiful place, and provided fascinating fodder for us to explore.

Sometimes, these designers would be unlikely characters. Who could have guessed, the first time we met Marc Jacobs, in 1986 at a Toronto garment factory—an adorable, personable kid with hair down to his elbows, eager to show us his small collection of knitwear—that this bright designer would be heralded by *Vogue* 14 years later as The Prince of Cool? Jacobs went on to not only rule the runways of New York and conquer Paris with his work for Louis Vuitton, he also helped define our sensibility of what makes fashion truly modern.

Also in 1986, I had the privilege of interviewing Gianni Versace at his new palazzo in the centre of Milan. The crew and I were charmed to discover this gentle, soft-spoken man exuding such a quiet and casual elegance—so far from the bold flamboyance associated with his label. I'd borrowed an outfit from the Versace boutique earlier in the day to wear for the interview, and Versace complimented me on how it looked. He asked where I got it, and I told him I'd borrowed it from his shop. "Did you meet my sister Donatella there? She does all the accessories, sunglasses, shoes. She's really fantastic. You must meet her. You should interview her too," he said proudly. It was clear Versace adored his younger sister and was eager to promote her. When he was murdered in 1997 and Donatella took over the House, I knew it was exactly what he would have wanted.

Most monumentally, we had the opportunity not only to meet so many legends at the height of their careers, but also witness their grand, sentimental exits. In 2001, six months before Yves Saint Laurent announced his retirement and

staged a grand swan-song retrospective of his work, I attended YSL's last full couture collection at the Intercontinental Hotel in Paris. "I'm afraid Yves Saint Laurent is the last one to think about elegant women," Pierre Bergé, the designer's long-time business partner and former lover, told me. "Now things are different... Life has changed. Maybe in a way, it's more modern, and easier... I don't want to argue with that. Everybody has a right to design clothes the way they feel. But for Saint Laurent, who loves and respects women and their bodies, it's very difficult to understand the feel of today."

Bergé went on to explain that creativity, not marketing, always came first for Saint Laurent. And because of that, he was at odds with the way the fashion world now functioned. At the end of that show, Saint Laurent hinted at his impending departure. He told me, "The work is very, very hard for me now. I'm beginning to be old, and I must think about retirement." I was saddened to think of the inevitability of losing this brilliant gentle giant from the very arena he'd helped define.

But perhaps the most poignant and memorable departure from this elaborate world of fashion was staged by the inimitable Valentino for the master's 45th anniversary in July, 2007—just three months before he announced his retirement. After the official opening of his retrospective exhibition in Rome, Valentino and his long-time partner Giancarlo Giammetti pulled out all the stops and hosted a surreal outdoor dinner party at the historic Temple of Venus, on a mammoth terrazzo facing the Colosseum. Eight hundred guests were treated to a sumptuous buffet and countless glasses of champagne. Just past midnight, beautiful aerial artists clad in flowing Valentino gowns sailed through the night sky to the strains of opera, the performance culminating in a seemingly endless display of fireworks. This was over-the-top beauty at its spectacular best, a dream only Valentino could have masterminded. The scene left many of us speechless, yet reminded us all why we stay in a business that at times can seem so tough, heartless and shallow.—*Jeanne*

GUESS
SEDUCTIVE



The new fragrance for women



Prada
Less is More
Miuccia Prada keeps us guessing, using unusual fabrics in combinations that keep even the savviest of fashion experts in awe. One season it's shiny silk tunics, tiny bloomers and turbans, and the next, furry wool skirts, cardigans and footless knee socks. Prada's background is equally diverse. The former communist followed a Ph.D in Political Science with five years in mime school before taking over the family business in 1978. She then revolutionized the luxury leather company. In 1985, when fashion was all about flash, Prada introduced a simple black nylon handbag that became a sensation. And then, in a sea of frills and neon, Prada made another fashion splash with her minimal, almost austere clothing. Although her collections are unpredictable, each season since that first has retained a simple Prada spirit—clean lines, unique textiles and a little something unexpected.
—Vanessa Grant

Contour by Getty Images

Jean Paul Gaultier
Darling Rascal
Grandson of a Parisian psychic, Jean Paul Gaultier has a penchant for the outlandish. He's known as "enfant terrible" of the fashion world for his mischievous antics both on the runway and off. He once sent live turkeys to critical fashion editors, and most recently, he invited burlesque star Dita Von Teese to perform a striptease at his couture presentation. The designer doesn't assign gender to clothing, famously dressing male models in skirts, tutus and even corsets. As a real enfant, Gaultier was fascinated by the glitzy costumes of the Folies Bergère showgirls, which started a lifelong passion for cinched waists. Madonna, Kylie Minogue and Lady Gaga are fans. His cat? Not so much: in an interview with the *Telegraph* he said, "Do you know that cats can't wear corsets? Not at all! They just fall over. I know, because I tried!" —VG



Christopher Bailey
Check Mate

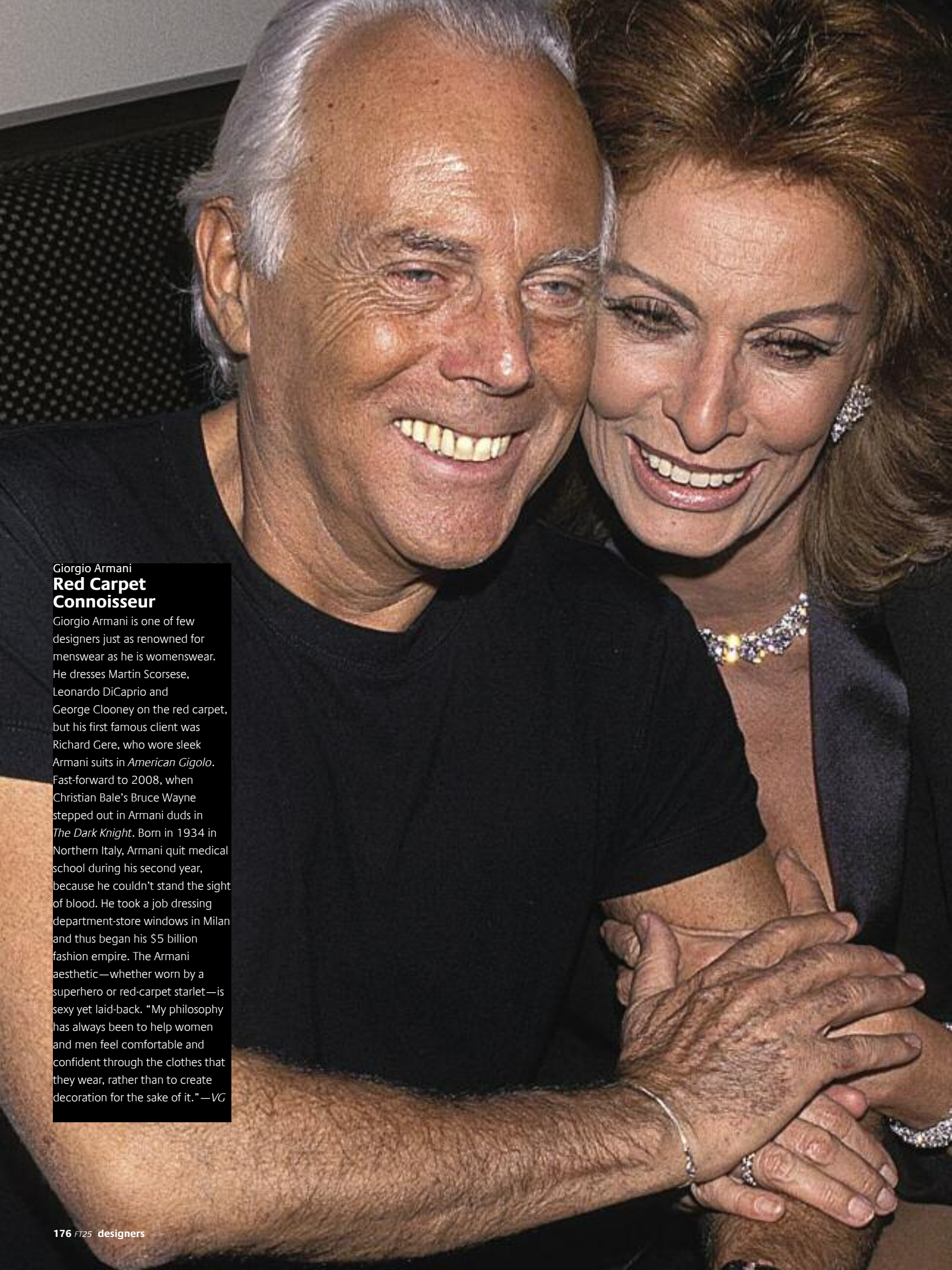
Defender of the trademark tan, black and red check, Burberry chief creative director Christopher Bailey puts pretty English roses and stylish dandies in cool clothes that reflect their heritage. The former Gucci designer rescued the label and its signature check from becoming the uniform of chavs: teenage delinquents and tacky wannabe football wives. While the pattern rarely makes a runway appearance, Burberry's tradition turns up in Bailey's modern interpretations of classic British style. "I want to explore what it means to be British," said Bailey when he first took the helm in 2001. Britishness, he has said, is not about clichés like a red bus or postbox, but the clash of formal society with rebelliousness and innovation, a concept Bailey obviously understands. How else could he reinvent the trench coat season after season?—VG



Contour by Getty Images

Oscar de la Renta
Fifth Avenue Tropics

The name Oscar de la Renta may conjure images of a socialite of a certain age, but the truth is that a well-tailored, ladylike dress is ageless. What makes de la Renta gowns so appealing, especially in spring, is his use of colour. He injects his collections with the flavour of his native Dominican Republic: exotic florals and vivid shades adding a hint of attitude to his almost modest silhouettes. And the women who wear his designs, whether socialite or starlet, know that fabric is carefully chosen, and structure specifically created to hide a multitude of sins and flatter just about any body. "I have always felt my role as a designer is to do the very best I can for a woman to make her look her best," de la Renta has said. "Fashion is only fashion once a woman puts it on."—VG



Giorgio Armani
**Red Carpet
Connoisseur**

Giorgio Armani is one of few designers just as renowned for menswear as he is womenswear. He dresses Martin Scorsese, Leonardo DiCaprio and George Clooney on the red carpet, but his first famous client was Richard Gere, who wore sleek Armani suits in *American Gigolo*. Fast-forward to 2008, when Christian Bale's Bruce Wayne stepped out in Armani duds in *The Dark Knight*. Born in 1934 in Northern Italy, Armani quit medical school during his second year, because he couldn't stand the sight of blood. He took a job dressing department-store windows in Milan and thus began his \$5 billion fashion empire. The Armani aesthetic—whether worn by a superhero or red-carpet starlet—is sexy yet laid-back. "My philosophy has always been to help women and men feel comfortable and confident through the clothes that they wear, rather than to create decoration for the sake of it." —VG

Courtesy of Chanel



Karl Lagerfeld
Mischief Maker

Chanel and Fendi creative director Karl Lagerfeld has gone from a quiet, if slightly eccentric, designer to a full-on phenomenon. He's a photographer, filmmaker and troublemaker, no stranger to courting controversy. One has to wonder if he's serious when he refers to his sunglasses as "my burka," admits that he admires pornography or says that it's only fat, chip-eating mothers who object to skinny models. Lest we forget that until the early 2000s, he was constantly waving a Chinese fan in front of his pudgy face. The German designer's motivation for his 92-pound weight loss? Wanting to fit into Hedi Slimane's trim black suits for Dior Homme. The 77-year-old has since made nice with curvy girls, but he's certainly not slowing down. Considering he didn't become famous until 50 and has since added a namesake label to his portfolio, it's safe to expect many more years of amusing Lagerfeld hijinks. —VG



**Yves Saint Laurent
Pushing
Boundaries**

"Fashions fade. Style is eternal." This, ironically, from a designer whose clothes have stood the test of time. Known as the world's best couturier, Yves Saint Laurent created the iconic Le Smoking tuxedo in 1966, forever changing women's formalwear options. He made staples of the safari jacket and the sexy sheer blouse—quite a controversial look in 1968. Saint Laurent was precocious. At 17, he beat Karl Lagerfeld in a fashion competition and was hired at Dior. At 21, he took the helm of the famous fashion house. He started his own company at 25 and began making boundary-

pushing clothes that made him a legend. Thigh-high leather boots, beatnik black and pop-art prints allowed women to incorporate a little fantasy into their wardrobe. And as his one-time companion and business partner said, "Chanel gave women freedom. Yves Saint Laurent gave them power." —VG



**Valentino
Empire State
of Mind**

Valentino Garavani may have created the white dress Jacqueline Kennedy wore when she became Jackie O., but his most memorable dresses are in red—a particularly vivid red that has become his signature. The ultra-tanned Italian legend is one of the richest men in Rome—along with his business partner Giancarlo Giammetti. He has homes all over the world: a palazzo in Rome, chalet in Gstaad, chateau in France, apartment in New York, mansion in London and, of course, a 152-foot yacht. His clothing is just as opulent. Intricate beading, delicate lace, hand embroidery and ruffle upon ruffle characterize Valentino's work. Called the last emperor of fashion, Valentino is friend to royalty—both genuine and of the silver screen, including Queen Paola of Belgium, Elizabeth Taylor and Audrey Hepburn. His 2007 retirement broke hearts. Valentino's reasoning: "I would like to leave the party when it is still full." —VG





John Galliano
Captain Fantastic

John Galliano lives in a fantasy world. He creates beautiful Russian princesses who prance haughtily in swiny, wired skirts, modern geishas who wear hot pink New Look skirt suits and a bouquet of strutting blossoms. Galliano's fondness for glamour and extravagance immediately attracted buyers to his early collections but his lack of a secure financial backer almost left the young designer in rags. Luckily, the owner of LVMH came calling when he hired Galliano to design for Givenchy, and two years later, for Dior. Galliano, who runs six miles along the Seine each day, is a showman and his own runway strut rivals those of his models. In 2009, the Gibraltar native was given the rank of Chevalier in the French Legion of Honour, officially becoming French fashion's knight in shining armour—a look, of course that has also graced the Galliano runway.—VG



Michael Kors
This Charming Man

Michael Kors may be best known by the masses for his often catty criticism as judge on *Project Runway*—but his clothes are made only to flatter. While his own critics have questioned Kors' consistently practical collections, the following for what fans call “no-brainer chic” has never waned. Born Karl Anderson Jr., Kors was a kiddie model and appeared in commercials for Lucky Charms cereal. He was five when his mother remarried and let him choose a new first name to go with his stepfather's last name. At 19, Kors made a name for himself again, designing a collection for Lothar's in New York. His womenswear collection was soon carried at upscale department stores like Bergdorf Goodman, Neiman Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue. Since then, he has added fragrances, shoes, accessories and two bridge lines to his growing namesake empire—something he should probably thank his mother for, because Karl Anderson Jr. just doesn't sound as chic.—VG



Gianni & Donatella Versace
Miami Heat
That Gianni Versace's former Miami mansion is now a private party club seems only fitting; the family is famously well connected. Gianni turned models into celebrities. The late designer's deep pockets transformed Naomi, Cindy, Linda and Christy into supermodels, and a decade later, Donatella used her A-list celeb friends as models, Madonna among them. The label's over-the-top glamour also made fans of Elton John, Princess Diana and Jennifer Lopez—remember that bellybutton-baring Versace “Jungle Dress” at the Grammys? That appearance helped make Donatella a celebrity herself. She was spoofed on *Saturday Night Live*, interviewed by Jimmy Kimmel and immortalized on *E! True Hollywood Story*. But the designer has never let her own celebrity status go to her head. “In Italian there is an expression,” she has said: “We don't sleep on the fame.”—VG



Marc Jacobs
Prince of Cool
Marc Jacobs is offbeat. Unlike most designers who want to make women look chic and elegant, Jacobs aims for just a touch of the gauche. He has said that he sees beauty in the imperfect and awkward. Unfortunately, the fashion world wasn't quite ready for his quirky aesthetic at first. In 1992, Jacobs's infamous grunge collection for Perry Ellis got him fired. Company execs couldn't see who would buy \$1,200 thrift-store-inspired dresses and slouchy lumberjack shirts in \$300-a-yard silk. Five years later, French luxury label Louis Vuitton took a chance on Jacobs. He designed the house's first ready-to-wear collection and kept the look strictly high street. In the years following, though, Jacobs has continued his love affair with awkwardness for his own youthful label and for sophisticated Vuitton. “It's quite nice to see that I didn't have to change who I was to reach two very different types of people.”—VG