



A BIOGRAPHY OF VALENTINO

Valentino is one of the most important and innovative designers in the world of fashion. From his unforgettable catwalk show at Palazzo Pitti in 1962 to the Lifetime Achievement Award bestowed on him by the Council of Fashion Designers of America in 2000, to the French Legion d' Honneur awarded to him by the President of the French Republic in 2005, his 45 years of creative and entrepreneurial accomplishments encapsulate the essence of the Made in Italy label, making his name an international synonym for elegance and imagination, modernity and everlasting beauty.

Valentino was still a teenager when he left his hometown of Voghera, where he was born in 1932, for Paris, having already the intention of turning fashion into his career and life. In what was then the real capital of culture and unrivalled Haute Couture, he worked for a number of years alongside Jean Dessès and then Guy Laroche, developing and refining his taste and a clear precocious talent.

In the early 1960s, when he thought his training period in Paris had come to an end, he moved to Rome to set up his first atelier. Here he met Giancarlo Giammetti, a young architecture student, who would share his aspirations and ideas and would become his business partner. From then onwards, Giammetti assumed the responsibility of all strategic and business-related aspects of the house, thus contributing to the realisation of one of the most important and solid partnerships of the history of fashion.

Those were the days of 'la Dolce Vita', with Hollywood stars in Rome making the films that would mark the history of that era. Word began to spread about a brilliant new creator of fashion; the rise of Valentino began. By the mid-1960s he was already considered the undisputed maestro of Italian Couture, receiving in 1967 the Neiman Marcus Award, the equivalent of an Oscar in the field of fashion. The Begum Aga Khan, Farah Diba, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Elizabeth Taylor, Marella Agnelli and Princess Margaret were already customers as well as personal friends.

For his famous 1968 'white collection', Valentino used for the first time the monogram of the house as a distinguishing decorative feature, indeed inventing what would then turn into 'logomania'. The 'V' logo appeared on fabrics and accessories, forming buckles on bags and belts. It was the first in a string of strategic ideas that would change the history of ready-to-wear.

During the 1970s and 1980s Valentino was the first Italian designer to launch Ready-to-Wear collections for men and women; to open boutiques in Rome and Milan, in the United States and the Far East; to draw up licensing agreements for the worldwide distribution of his creations; and to devise advertising campaigns with the collaboration of new innovative and talented photographers. This gained him an increasing number of successes and awards, including the title of "Grande Ufficiale dell'Ordine al Merito" which he received by the President of the Italian Republic Sandro Pertini and "Cavaliere di Gran



Croce” which he received by the President of the Italian Republic Francesco Cossiga.

These years saw the confirmation of his success: the most famous women of the world and members of the aristocracy wore his designs on red carpets and to the most exclusive and photographed parties and wedding ceremonies. And Valentino became the glamour designer par excellence. His advertising campaigns, with their perfect castings, devised and realised by young talents destined to become very successful, were an expression of unparalleled aesthetics. Valentino became synonym for Italian fashion at its most sophisticated.

In 1982 the Metropolitan Museum of New York opened its doors to fashion for the first time, hosting a Valentino catwalk show. In the same year, Franco Maria Ricci published a lavish monographic book about him, which would be the first of a long series to be dedicated to him.

In February 1990, Valentino and Giancarlo Giammetti founded the charity L.I.F.E. under the patronage of Elizabeth Taylor, to help children affected by HIV-related illnesses.

The first thirty years of his career were celebrated in 1991 with a succession of prestigious events. ‘Valentino. Thirty years of magic’ was both the title of a monographic book and an exhibition held at Palazzo Mignanelli, the maison’s headquarters, displaying over 300 of his garments. The Italian state television broadcaster RAI screened a full-length film about Valentino’s world and life, while another exhibition brought together a collection of works by some of fashion’s leading photographers and illustrators, all inspired by Valentino’s creations. Elizabeth Taylor, Claudia Schiffer, Linda Evangelista and Marisa Berenson were amongst the friends who celebrated with him at a gala with over 400 guests.

The following year, ‘Valentino: Thirty years of magic’ was shown in New York, representing Italy in the ceremonies marking the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America. In its opening two weeks, the exhibition was seen by more than 70,000 visitors. Proceeds from the show were donated to the New York Hospital to finance the building of a new wing for its AIDS Care Centre.

Valentino chose to celebrate his fashion house’s 40th anniversary in Los Angeles. The party, again in aid of charity (collecting funds for the Child Priority foundation), was organised in collaboration with Steven Spielberg, Kate Capshaw, Tom Hanks and Rita Wilson. The evening was also the occasion for the presentation of *Il libro rosso di Valentino* (‘Valentino’s red book’), edited by Franca Sozzani, containing pictures of 40 contemporary iconic women (including Ashley Judd, Gisele, Ines Sastre, Isabella Rossellini, Kate Moss, Liz Hurley, Milla Jovovich and Naomi Campbell), all dressed in Valentino Red and photographed by top fashion photographers.

In 2001 Julia Roberts received her Academy Award wearing a ‘vintage’ Valentino gown, and was seen to



shine on all television screens, magazines and newspapers of the world, contributing to the launch of what would become one of the most significant fashion trends of recent years: Vintage.

In 2002 Valentino represented Italy, and the country's traditional ability to elevate creativity and craftsmanship to the highest levels with taste and supreme elegance, during the closing ceremony of the 2002 winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, broadcast worldwide on February 24th.

In the same year the Valentino brand was acquired by the Marzotto Group, one of the oldest and most highly regarded textile and clothing manufacturers in the world. Valentino has maintained the role of designer and creative director of all lines.

In 2006 Valentino accepted the invitation of his friend Meryl Streep and played himself in a short cameo role in the widely discussed film *The Devil Wears Prada*, one of the most popular and successful pictures of the season.

Valentino's 45 years of work represent a unique phenomenon in the history of fashion. Indeed, no great designer has ever reached this target remaining for so long the creative soul and force of the company that carries his name.