



#### NOIR DRAMA

*Cast a spell in the season's bewitching eveningwear!*

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# Making Beauty

*The Timeless Couture Artistry of Valentino Garavani*

◀ Boasting an eponymous shade of crimson ("Valentino Red") and an elite clientele of celebrities, socialites, and royalty, the decadent designs of Valentino Garavani virtually defined glamour over the course of a thriving half-decade of work. The couturier had a way of transforming women with his designs: whether a painstakingly-detailed beaded gown or the diaphanous folds of a ballskirt, each piece to emerge from his atelier celebrated the magnificence of womanhood—fearless beauty and femininity. One could expect nothing less from the man who proclaimed to "know what women want."

Though the designer has retired from service as a chieftain of chic, his rockstar-like legacy lives on. The House that Valentino

built continues to weave fashion fantasy with every collection, owing everything to the visionary mononym who defined its brashly elegant signature style.

Fêted in recent years with a splashy 45th anniversary gala, documentary (*Valentino: The Last Emperor*), and, this autumn, a comprehensive retrospective at London's Somerset House (*Valentino: Master of Couture*), it's clear that this tawny-skinned tastemaker's influence persists with vigor. On the eve of the exhibition's debut, we recount key moments from Valentino's career, tracking the evolution of his art and taking a closer look at the opulent designs which took the world by storm. Viva la Valentino!





## *Painting the Town (Valentino) Red*

Cutting his teeth—and luxuriant fabrics—in the ateliers of French couture masters including Guy Laroche, Valentino learned the art of elegance. It was during these early days that fashion insiders were introduced to what would become touchstones of his aes-

thetic: oversized bows, fountain draping, and the copious use of lace abound, striking a chord with European critics. A career-making show at Florence's Pitti Palace in 1962

was nothing less than a triumph, prompting buyers and discerning upmarket customers to take notice of the promising designer.

A deluge of high-profile appointments followed, along with what would become a lifelong romance and business partnership

### *The decadent designs of Valentino Garavani virtually defined glamour:*

with Giancarlo Giammetti. Together, Valentino and Giammetti took on the enterprise of turning a small Italian design outfit into

an international fashion powerhouse. As a spate of chic women began to seek out Valentino's services—and his emblematic poppy red creations—to outfit themselves, it was clear the duo had developed a special chemistry strong enough to turn the sartorial world upside down.

### *American Beauties*

Though alluring enough to stand on their own aesthetic merits, it was Valentino's celebrity clientele that made his designs iconic. The late '60s and '70s saw disparately stylish women like Elizabeth Taylor and Jackie Kennedy donning Valentino, solidifying his reputation as a go-to designer among America's beau monde. This prolific period birthed designs that are consistently included in editorial roundups of "Landmark Fashion Moments," from the tasteful lace overlay dress Kennedy wore for her marriage to Aristotle Onassis to the feather-hemmed column gown Taylor wore to the Italian premiere of *Spartacus*. Despite such bountiful success, Valentino was wary of his designs becoming repetitive



VALENTINO

Romantic evening gown from the Spring/Summer 1995 Haute Couture collection

## *New Ideas, Resurrections*

A sense of confident experimentation seeped into Valentino's collections during the '80s and '90s, seeing the playful use of color and exaggerated silhouettes reflective of the era. Layering textures, patterns, and drawing inspiration from various cultures, the maestro evolved his house during this period. Though he continued to parade out Red Carpet ready-gowns, he also dabbled in more casual wear and introduced ethnically-influenced designs to keep his work globally relevant.

*Valentino's vouchish alchemy lay ins his ability to present progressive looks while remaining timeless.*

The late-'90s and early noughties saw modern day screen sirens plunge into the Valentino archives before major public appearances. Hollywood's new garde repurposed vintage designs to great acclaim: Julia Roberts dressed in a black-and-white velvet number as she accepted her Best Actress award for Erin Brockovich; Jennifer Lopez resurrected a mint green piece originally designed for Jackie O; Jennifer Garner lived a tangerine dream moment as she assumed presenter duties at an Oscars ceremony—and all looked gorgeously au courant.

Valentino's vouchish alchemy lay in his ability to present progressive looks while remaining timeless. Such is the reason historians, editors, and vintage collectors continue to reference the creator's classically chic back catalogue: Valentino is forever, and fashion is better for it.

Red taffeta evening gown from FW 2002/2003



Valentino: Master of Couture  
Somerset House, London,  
from 29.11.2012 - 3.03.2013

VALENTINO

## *Editor's Picks*

