

HAPPY 45TH MR. VALENTINO!



WE BAKE A CAKE FOR THE **LEGENDARY DESIGNER** WHO DEFINED TIMELESSNESS BY STICKING TO HIS TASTES

The designer Valentino Clemente Ludovico Garavani once told *The New Yorker*, “There are many things you have to do in life, but you cannot ignore the roses. When they demand to be seen, one simply has no choice but to go to them.” He was speaking about the blooming fields of Wideville, his 300-acre estate outside of Paris that stars a chateau surrounded by a moat. But consider Valentino’s last forty-five years of fashion, an anniversary he celebrates this year with much fanfare, and he could have been speaking about the women he dresses as well as the roses. “I like them both,” he says.

The legend goes that Valentino was born in Voghera, a small town south of Milan. He arrived in Paris when he was 18 and worked for the designer Jean Dessès and then Guy Laroche. He moved to Rome during its starry la dolce vita years and opened his atelier in 1959 at the foot of the Spanish Steps. He believes that the successes to come were impossible even to dream of in those early days. “At that time, fashion wasn’t so huge, so international and popular like today,” he says. “Fashion was for rich people. It was a niche business. My development as a designer, as a business, was not something that one could even imagine.”

Harold Koda, the head curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Costume Institute, has succinctly described what Valentino does: “[He] makes outrageously pretty dresses without making them seem silly.” This lifetime pursuit has borne turbans, pantsuits, parades of red dresses, a V-shaped silhouette or two, several prominent bows (the runway of his Fall 2005 couture collection was backed by a giant twinkling bow), and a legendary White Collection. “What is extravagance to you is not extravagance to me,” he says quickly, matter-of-factly. A year ago he was awarded the Légion d’honneur. Well before that, he was the first Italian designer to be listed on that country’s stock exchange. At one point, his name was licensed to more than one hundred companies for products ranging from men’s ties to cigarette lighters—even bathroom tiles. Then there are the impeccable women he has outfitted: Madame Bernadette Chirac, Farah Diba, Jacqueline Kennedy (who wore white Valentino for her wedding to Aristotle Onassis), Elizabeth Taylor (who met Valentino while filming *Spartacus* in Rome), Princess Rosario of Bulgaria, Gloria Guinness, Babe Paley, Anjelica Huston, and Gwyneth Paltrow. As he has noted in *The New Yorker*, “Who should I dress? Girls in *streep* malls?”

His legacy will be one of thrilling consistency; Valentino does not reinvent. His clothes are sensitive to the whims of his women without being specific to a moment, which is how they can be truly timeless. “I kept faithful to my style,” he says. “I didn’t change with the different looks that came around. I don’t get inspired by the press. I don’t look at other designers’ businesses. I don’t copy them.” The same can be said of his personal appearance—the immaculate grooming, the handsome demi-bouffant, the copper skin tone.

That Valentino still designs Valentino is another example of originality. “It is not common that a designer will last under his own name for so many years,” he says. “I think I’m the last one of them. It’s a bit strange for me to discover that I’m so old. This is a special moment. I celebrate with joy and pride and a bit of emotion.” His preferred celebration cake: “Whatever is with a lot of dark chocolate and very little sugar.” His advice to the next generation: “Try to create your own style that will last for forty-five years.” Will you please continue designing forever, Mr. Valentino? “Forever is a big word.” **Mark Jacobs**

Above: Birthday cake with portrait by Karl Lagerfeld

Photography Magnus Unnar Styling Brian Molloy

Makeup Maki Ryoke Hair Dai Michishita for Redken at Cutler, NYC

Models Oxana Pautova, Sofi Berelidze, Edda Petursdottir, Heidi Verster

(Supreme), Tim Paulin, Davi Costa, Jonathan Keyser (Wilhelmina)

Stylist assistant Kira Latyschow Location Pier 59 Studios, NYC

Prop styling Linda Keil (Halley Resources) Cake design Valencia Bakery