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Valentina: American Couture And The Cult Of Celebrity



Synopsis

Valentina was the twentieth century's first American fashion designer celebrity, working and living on equal social footing with the clientele she dressed (Greta Garbo, Gloria Swanson, Katharine Hepburn, Millicent Rogers, and Audrey Hepburn, among others). One of the few designers who proved that America could live without the Parisian haute couture, her career is a much needed missing link in the history of American fashion. Beyond merely turning out show-stopping evening gowns, Valentina's exotic beauty, dramatic personality, and incomparable style earned her a legendary reputation. Kohle Yohannan explores the carefully constructed persona and lore of this designer who helped define American Couture. Published in association with the Museum of the City of New York's exhibition *Valentina: New York Couture and the Cult of Celebrity*, this book includes photographs, never-before-seen personal ephemera, sketches, and original platinum prints from master photographers such as Cecil Beaton, Horst P. Horst, and George Hoyningen-Huene.

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Customer Reviews

I had awaited the arrival of this new work by noted art historian Kohle Yohannan with great anticipation. The author's earlier treatments of fashion history were noteworthy not only because, as expected of the genre, they were beautiful objects filled with stunning images, but they took the story of fashion well beyond the industry of clothes making and pretty pictures and into the realm of solid history and good storytelling. With *VALENTINA: American Couture and the Cult of Celebrity*,

Yohannan has matured and honed his vision and understanding of the powerful impact that fashion has upon culture. But more compellingly, the author peels away the layers of superficiality often found in such works to reveal just how fashion, and fashion market makers, impact and express culture in profound and unpredictable ways that only begin with the clothes themselves. In *Valentina*, Yohannan has introduced the reader to a woman who was her own muse, with her own story to be told, and tell it she did, in New York City opera houses and Park Avenue cocktail parties, in chic nightclubs and on the floor of her atelier in the heart of Manhattan's glamorous midtown. As a fashion market maker, Valentina opened an exciting chapter in American culture and showed the women of Hollywood and New York just what mythic creatures they could become, if only they dared to become. But it was Valentina herself who dazzled both high society and the populace of the silver screen with the spectacle of the self-created mythos and the impact of good costuming. Yohannan is a bold storyteller whose vision and keen eye for the Valentina mythos has brought together a stunning collection of original photographs, letters, and other source materials from the colorful life of this extraordinary creature called, *Valentina*. A superbly produced book that is a delight to hold and a reminder of why printed books are still so very important, *Valentina* is also an enchanting story that begs to be read from cover to cover.

Extremely well written; absolutely gorgeous photos; fascinating, engaging story. An entertaining read and fantastic fashion book!

This is a stunning book. The author was clearly bewitched by his subject. His research was meticulous and comprehensive, and the end result is a passionate and thrilling story, about an immigrant artist and the glamorous era in which she became an iconic personality. The fashion photos are exquisite, including many celebrity photos which have never been published before. In addition, early photos of Valentina in the 1920's offer a precious view of the young Russian woman who came to America with dreams and drive. With wit, glamour and creativity she invented her own persona and used it to attract her celebrity clientele. This book provides a wonderful record of her elegant and groundbreaking style.

Kohle Yohannan's wonderful book about *Valentina* is as elegant as the woman herself. Beautifully written, well documented, with fabulous photographs, this is a book to keep forever. *Valentina* would be proud.

This is a completely wonderful book, beautifully produced and it answers many mysteries about Valentina Schlee. It is a tonic that such a fabulous book can be published about a fashion designer and icon, who had previously disappeared into obscurity. Of course it will never be possible to know the whole truth about her because so much is veiled in mythology, and as the author points out, she was a compulsive re-inventor of her past. I devoured this book as soon as it arrived (very promptly) and my only sadness is that the author did not get in touch with me as I knew Valentina (1982-4, so late in her life) and could at least have told him some more of her stories, for better or for worse!

Hugo Vickers

This book rewards on many levels. First, the clothes are marvelous, intricately cut and draped but very wearable. They just flow over the body, flattering every curve. Second, the story of Valentina's saga inspires the reader to strive to become the person of his or her dreams. The superb photographs, many taken by the superstars of the era, the forties and fifties, are accompanied by Kohle Yohannan's intelligent and beautifully written text. Valentina was a gorgeous and original persona and this elegant book tells her story brilliantly.

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