

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schiap: To Couture, Or Not to Couture

DANA WOOD

“In difficult times,  
fashion is outrageous.”

- Elsa Schiaparelli

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schiap Lecture Outline

Act One: The Rise

Act Two: The Fall

Act Three: The Resurrection

# Act One: The Rise

# Act One: The Rise

- 411 Factoids
- Trompe l'Oeil: The Sweater That Started It All
- Paris-Based Pioneer
- She's The Boss
- Enter Dalí

# Elsa Schiaparelli

1890-1973

(She wore a lot of hats!)





# Elsa Schiaparelli

## 4 | I Factoids

**BORN:** 1890, Rome

**DIED:** 1973, Paris

**HAILED FROM:** Family of Italian royalty, scholars + science nerds; resided in Palazzo Corsini

**EDUCATION:** Convent in Switzerland, followed by “the school of life”

**HUSBANDS:** One, the mysterious “paranormal” Wilhelm Wendt de Kerlor

**CHILDREN:** One, Gogo (née Maria Luisa Yvonne Radha de Wendt de Kerlor)

**DESIGN TRAINING:** In mid 1920s, learning on the job at a company a friend bought

**ESTABLISHED FASHION HOUSE:** 1927

**FAMOUS FOR:** Schiap Pink, Shocking perfume and merging fashion + Surrealism


# Trompe l'Oeil: The Sweater That Launched a Career



# Imitation, the sincerest...

[lry](#) [patterns](#) [yarns](#) [people](#) [groups](#) [help](#) [🔍](#) [forums](#) [my notebook](#)

[ladyisabel's Schiaparelli Bowknot Sweate...](#) 👍 2



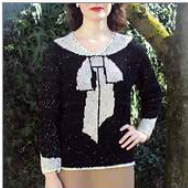
Finished May 2016

no project notes

6 photos →

[more...](#)

[AlidaVintage's 1927 Elsa Schiaparelli's bo...](#) 👍 41 💬 8 😊



Finished August 2015


1,574 meters = 7 skeins  
[Filati Bracco Super Baby 820 Black](#)

For notes please visit my blog:  
<http://alidavintage.blogspot.it/2016/schiaparellis-bowknot-jumper-1927.html>

6 photos →

[more...](#)

[deajensen's Baby Bowknot Vest](#) 🔒 1 👍 17 💬 4 😊



Finished January 2014


194 meters = 1.85 skeins  
[Jamieson's Shetland Spindrift 101 Shetland Black](#)

Hoping to improve my trapping skills by knitting this so-called "Armenian" project. Pretty much every everything about this project has been modified...not to make it better, just ...

5 photos →

[more...](#)

[Yarncuture's Maryum Karim](#) 🔒 8 👍 16 💬 5 😊



Finished March 2013


1,892 meters = 9 skeins  
[Knit Picks Capretta cream and black](#)

...e fabric. After knitting all the pieces I connected the bottom edges first. After assembly I crocheted a single crochet border using a g-hook on the wrong side. Afterwards I blocked the crocheted border only using straight pins and water. (All

2 photos →

[more...](#)

[17Q17's Homage](#) 🔒 4 👍 19 💬 2 😊



Finished January 2012


1,307 meters = 5.5 skeins  
[Knit Picks Gloss Fingering Black](#)

Will work in the round, because stranding on the Purl side is a pain in the rear and the less I have to do, the happier I will be. I'm shooting for roughly 5.75-6 stitches per inch in the st...

11 photos →

[more...](#)

[marieknitte's Schiaparelli Bowknot Sweater](#) 🔒 1 👍 16 😊



Finished September 2011

5 skeins  
[knitshop yarns Alpaca Fino white](#)

Love the pattern, but I changed the neckside of the bow, to make it more "round". The fit around neck and shoulders is really great, perhaps because of the difference between front- and...

4 photos →

[more...](#)

...form of flattery!



# A Real McCoy

(Courtesy of The Philadelphia Museum of Art)



# Our Real McCoy

(Also Courtesy of The Philadelphia Museum of Art)



# Paris-Based Pioneer: The Oft-Copied Schiap's Many(!) Fashion Innovations

- ✓ Trompe l'Oeil
- ✓ Wrap Dresses
- ✓ Split Skirts (Pre-Cursor to Wide-Legged Pants)
- ✓ Swimsuits With Built-In Bras
- ✓ Zippers! On the outside!
- ✓ Reversible + Convertible Clothing
- ✓ Pockets As Purses
- ✓ Matching Jackets for Dinner Dresses

# Wrap Dresses



Summer-y,  
lightweight take  
on the wrap dress



# Split Skirts



Lilí Álvarez  
1930s Tennis Hottie

# Swimsuits With Built-In Bras

Dec. 20, 1932.

E. SCHIAPARELLI  
WEARING APPAREL

1,891,610

Filed Dec. 13, 1930

Fig. 1

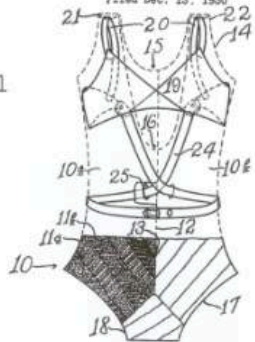
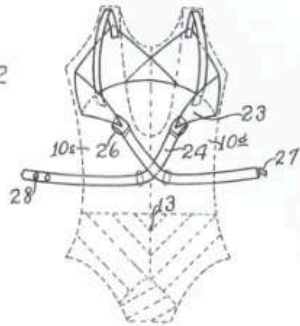


Fig. 2



INVENTOR  
E. Schiaparelli  
BY  
Helen Bristol Johnson & Leavenworth  
ATTORNEYS

*Schiaparelli's*  
STORY  
IS BRIEF!

brief...  
for backyard  
sunning!

brief...  
for  
swimming!

One suit... convertible for sunning  
in your own backyard, or for sun-bathing  
on the beach! Exclusively designed for  
Catalina by famed Schiaparelli. Featured at  
better department and specialty stores. \$8.00

*Catalina*  
LOOK FOR THE FLYING FISH  
a Catalina Trade

For illustrated booklet of other Catalina styles, write Catalina, Inc. Dept. 628 • 443 S. San Pedro St., Los Angeles 12, Calif.



# Visible Zippers



# Visible Zippers

Francis Drake  
“I’d Give My Life”



# Convertible + Reversible



# Pockets As Purses



# Evening Dresses With Matching Jackets



# She's The Boss



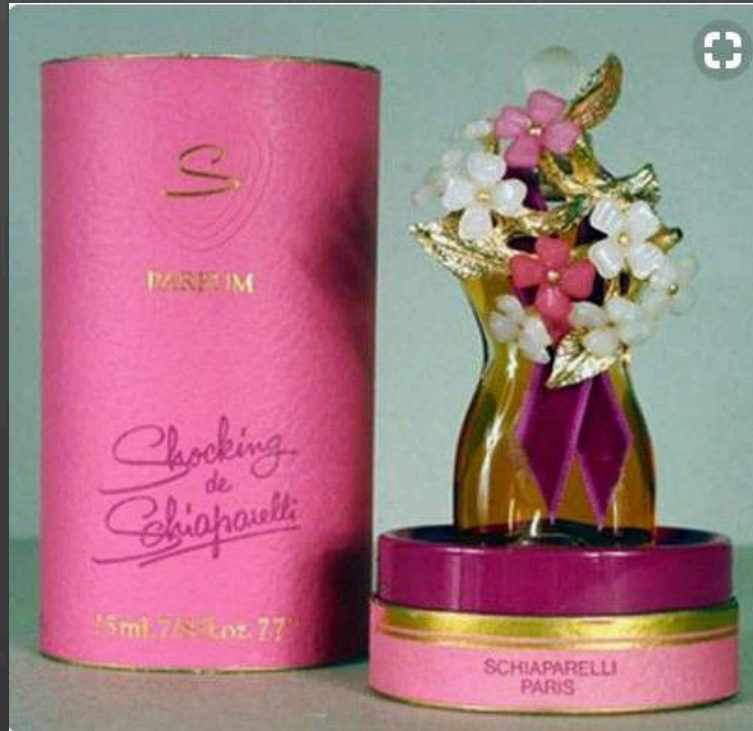
21 Place Vendôme

# She's The Boss

## At her Pre-War height, Schiap...

- Had almost 100 workrooms employing thousands of people, cranking out up 10k garments per year.
- By 1930, was grossing millions of francs annually.
- In 1935, shifted her base of ops to 21 Place Vendôme, one of the chicest, most high-profile commercial addresses in Paris.
- With the “Schiap Shop” next to her atelier, she was the first to merge RTW and custom (aka Prêt à Porter and Couture).
- Set the template for modern-day “branding” by pushing into licenses for swimwear, eyewear, home goods. Eleven American companies had licenses to move Schiaparelli merch.

# Schiap's Beauty Biz

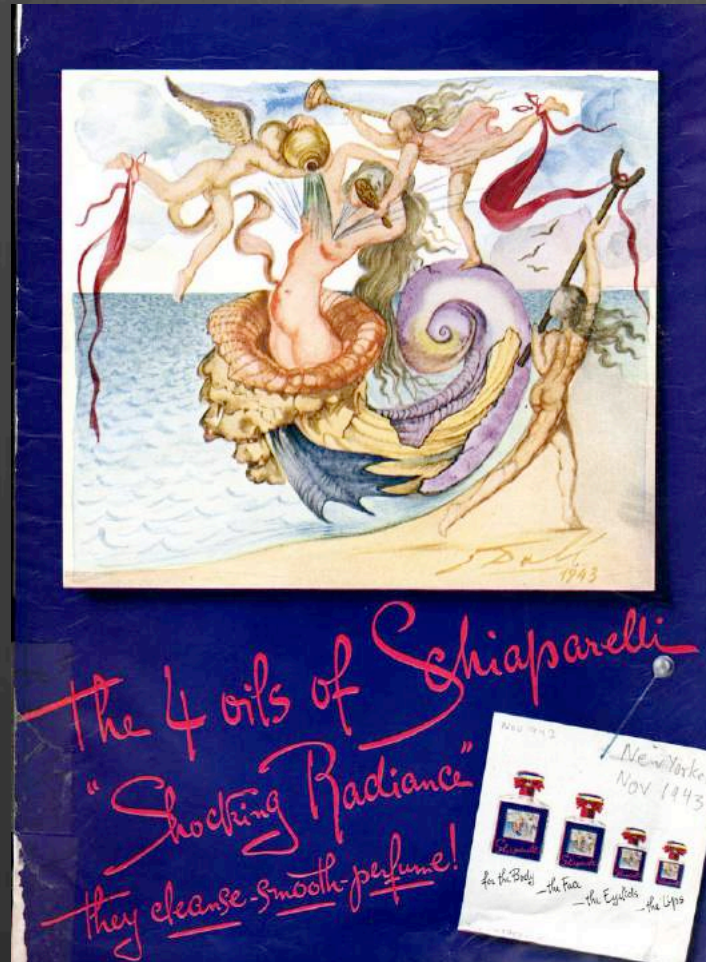


It started with a perfume...

...and led to so much more



Bath Sponges!



Skin Oils!

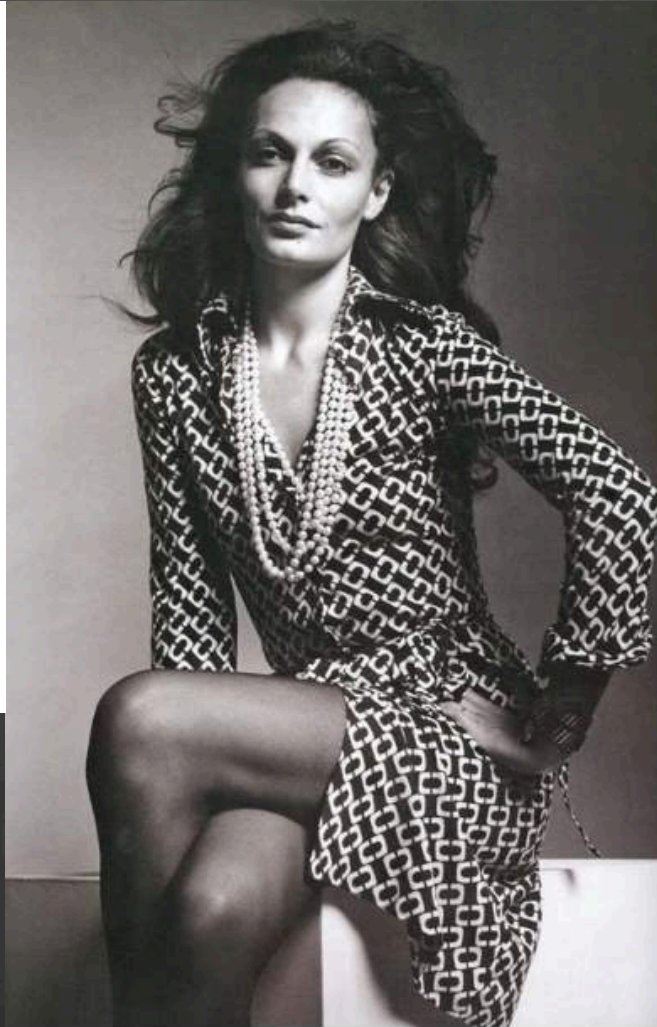


Nail Lacquer!

# Designers Who Owe a Debt



Jean Paul Gaultier



DVF



Betsey Johnson

# Enter Dalí

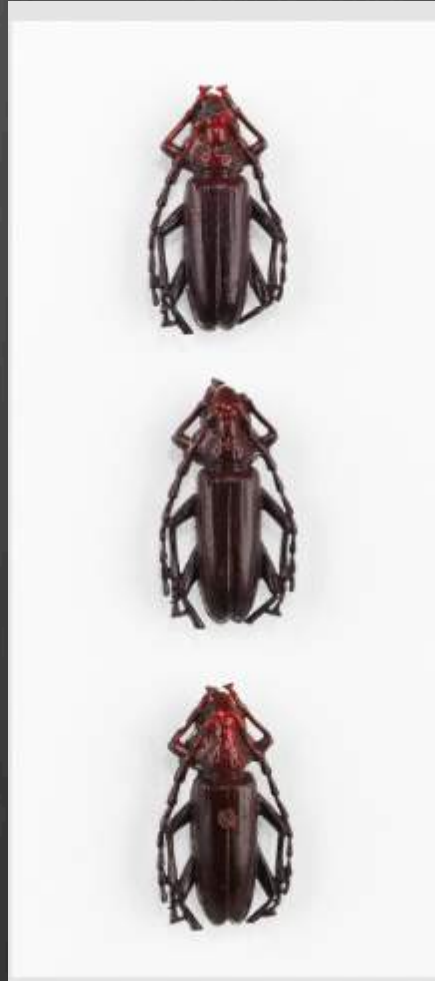


# Why Did Dalí & Schiap Click?

They shared...

- Similar family dynamics / drama
- Penchant for personal re-invention
- “Flexible” relationship to the truth
- Real ear for languages
- Aversion to the status quo
- Love of astrology and mysticism
- Propensity for “people collecting”
- Massive work ethic

# Schiap's Surrealist Streak



# Fruits of Their Friendship



Shoe Hat



Tear Dress



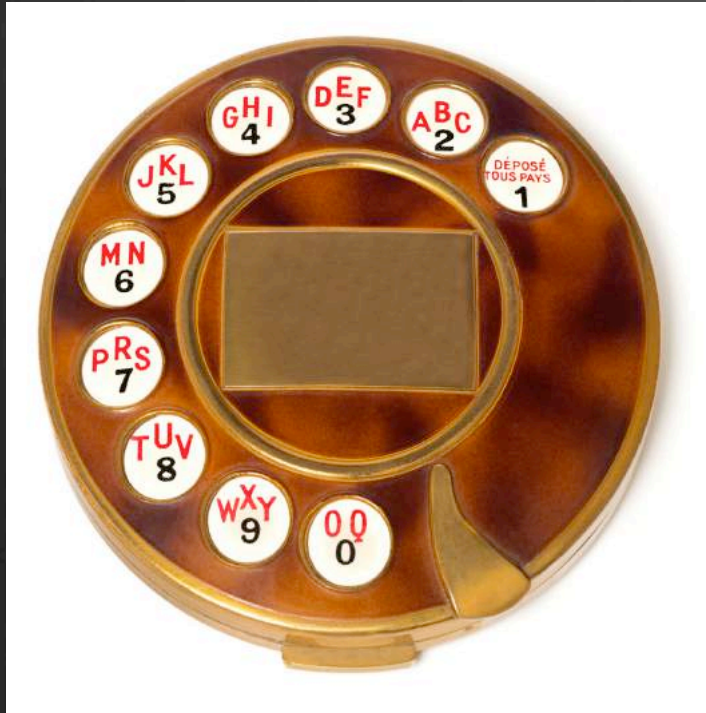
Skeleton Dress



Lobster Dress



# Fruits of Their Friendship



Telephone Dial Compact



Roy Soleil Perfume

# Fruits of Their Friendship



"Telephone Ear Rings"



"Eye of Time"



"Ruby Lips"

# Super Success



# Act Two: The Fall

# Act Two: The Fall

- Denial Gives Way to Panic
- Schiap Under Suspicion
- Undone By “The New Look”

# Denial Gives Way to Panic

After partying alongside her cashed-up clientele, Schiap...

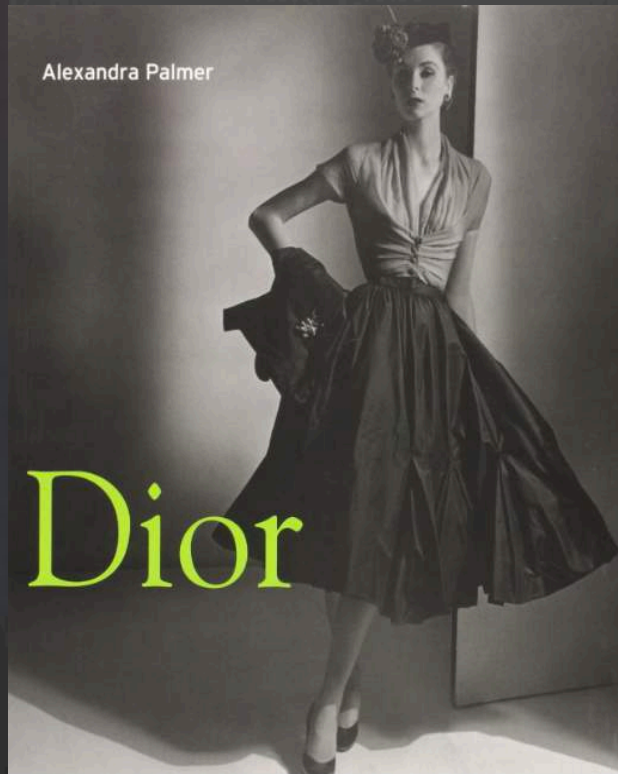
- Tricked-out the basement of 21 Place Vendôme as a bomb shelter
- Sheltered 30 Belgian refugees in her mansion
- Allowed Gogo to ferry soldiers to the front line
- Shifted from art and whimsy to (almost) pure practicality
  - “Siren” suit
  - 3-piece waterproof ensemble w/ hood
  - Pockets as purses
  - Somber military palette of greens and blues

# Schiap Under Suspicion

- By the time Schiap left Paris for America – for good - in 1942, the French, British, German and American governments all thought she was a spy
- Throughout her four years in the U.S. - from 1942 to 1946 - she was watched like a hawk by the FBI
- Still, she was determined to try to maintain “business as usual” in Paris, while shoring up her lucrative American base

# Undone by “The New Look”

- Hyper-Feminine Silhouette
- Nipped-In, Microscopic Waist
- Super-Full Skirt
- Often Paired With Sky-High Heels



# Act Three: The Resurrection

# Act Three: The Resurrection

- White Knight: Diego Della Valle
- To Couture, Or Not to Couture
- Modern Compromise: Prêt à Couture
- Tweaking the House Codes
- A/W 2017-2018

# White Knight: Diego Della Valle



- Billionaire Italian fashion mogul (Tod's, Fay, Hogan, Schiaparelli, Roger Vivier).
- Created driving mocs (Tod's Gommino, with 133 rubber "pebbles" on the sole).
- Proponent of preserving Italian landmarks and culture. Instituted a foundation for the support of Teatro alla Scala and bankrolled restoration of Colosseum in Rome.

# Couture: What It Is



- Regulated by French Ministry of Industry and Fédération Française de la Couture
- Applicants must be greenlighted the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture
- To qualify, houses must:
  - Design original made-to-order garments for private clients requiring at least one fitting
  - Maintain an atelier with at least 15 full-time staffers
  - Operate a separate workshop with at least 20 full-time technical workers
  - Present at least 50 original garments during couture weeks in Paris in Jan + July

# Couture: What It Isn't

## Faux Couture

Light-switch covers, T-shirts, hairspray—much of the mundane stuff has co-opted the moniker of fashion's haute métier.

Illustration by JOHN HENDRIX

**F**or anyone lucky enough to catch it on the Sundance Channel, the documentary *Yves Saint Laurent: 5 Avenue Marceau 75116 Paris* offers a crystal-clear window into the intensity, the sky-high level of craft, and the painstaking labor poured into a single couture creation. As he reads his spring 2002 collection, the last of his storied 40-year career, Saint Laurent holds court from a table in his atelier while his senior staffers and *petites mains* swirl around him. After working together for so long (decades, in some cases), Saint Laurent's team members are expert at articulating the boss's vision. While the clock ticks and the pressure mounts, they never lose their cool as they build each look from sketch to toile to finished garment. And as Saint Laurent heaps on the praise between drags on his ever-present cigarette—there are many a “*merveilleuse*” and “*sensationnelle*” peppering the film's soundtrack—the pride of the old-school couture makers is palpable.

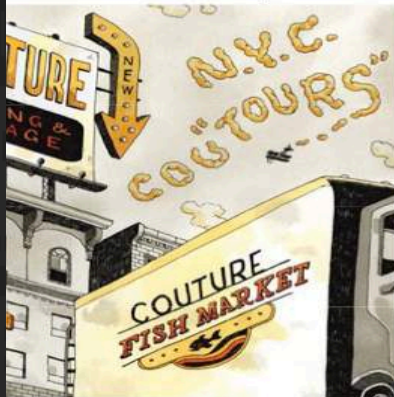
Somehow, viewed against this backdrop, a \$48 bumskimming number from *Whore Couture*—with cutouts, no less—doesn't conjure up quite the same lofty image.

No, it's not your imagination—the entire world has gone positively “couture” cuckoo. What started as a slow creep has become a full-on avalanche. A recent scan of trademarks issued by the United States Patent and Trademark Office revealed more than 1,000 bearing some variation on the word “couture.” And fashion is the least of it. All manner of merch is now available at the (alleged) couture level, from light-switch covers and saddle pads to rosé wine, doggie nail lacquer and hairspray. Retailers have hopped on the bandwagon too, creating special sale areas for some of their priciest (although not technically couture) duds. Even Zappos, the popular online store, has a “couture” site-within-a-site featuring high-end shoes and clothes. While it's stocked with plenty of Jean Paul Gaultier and a smattering of Alexander McQueen, none of it is actually couture.

Although the term “haute couture” is still precisely defined by France's *Chambre Syndicale*—reserved for custom-fitted clothing created by only a handful of firms meeting strict guidelines—the word “couture” itself has been utterly hijacked. When that moniker is attached to pretty much anything else, products are positioned as a cut above the herd, regardless of whether there is anything even remotely handcrafted about them.

Of course, it's pretty easy to connect the dots between the vaunted past of the word “couture” and its decidedly alarming present; indeed, it's hard not to blame two sunny So-Cal gals in particular. And as it turns out, Gela Nash-Taylor and Pamela Skais-Levy are happy to take the heat. In the mid-Nineties, back when all those velvet tracksuits were just a twinkle in their eyes, “couture” was still cloistered behind the gated walls of the fashion community. But after pairing it with “Juicy,”

“Television commentators use ‘couture’ in the same way they used to use the word ‘posh,’” says Doonan.



## Faux Couture



Juicy Couture's Gela Nash-Taylor (at left) and Pamela Skais-Levy

the best buds and business partners just knew they'd hit on the perfect name for their happy, cozy Cali togs. “The idea was a spoof on couture,” says Nash-Taylor. “Because we're really the opposite of couture, which is sort of 80 hours to make one dress versus 80 hours to make 8,000 T-shirts.”

At the time, Nash-Taylor notes, “No one used that word.”

“One rep used to pronounce it ‘coater,’” adds Skais-Levy.

Ten-plus years, massive success and one Liz Claiborne Inc. buyout later, plenty of other brands are looking to ride those “custom” coattails.

“It's pretty amazing that ‘couture’ is now the word to add to any fashion label—even food—just to make it appealing,” says Nash-Taylor. “There's even a bathroom line.” (She's right: It's the AdattoCasa Couture line of pricey leather and elaborately tiled vanities.)

“Couture” is part of our modern world now, and we did start that craze,” Nash-Taylor adds. “I feel kind of proud about that.”

Not everyone finds attaching a term connoting rarefied expertise to mass-produced hoodies (or worse) quite so innocuous. Even more egregious, to some, is the inappropriate use of the term by newly minted fashion “experts.” Drop a mic into the hands of some of these red-carpet insta-pundits and you're virtually guaranteed to hear “couture” butchered beyond recognition.

“Television commentators use ‘couture’ in the way they used to use the word ‘posh,’” as in “Oh, she's wearing a couture gown.” And I personally find that a gigantic drag,” says Simon Doonan, creative director of Barneys New York. “Nothing should be called couture unless it's got hours of handwork in it, and blood and sweat.”

“Unless 500 nuns went blind beading it,” Doonan continues, “the word ‘couture’ should not be used at all.”

Perhaps because she spent 14 years as a magazine editor before transitioning to TV six years ago, Stacy London isn't one of the serial couture abusers, although she confesses to “giggling” at those who are. “It's an injustice to use the term incorrectly, because couture has such a rich history,” says the *What Not to Wear* host. “It's just disappointing.”

Still, London can understand why, especially on TV, the true meaning of couture has become thoroughly bastardized. “Television has democratized fashion,” she says. “To not give couture its due is a shame. But at the same time, how relevant is it in pop culture—particularly to the audiences who are watching these shows?”

“Couture is nice as an art form. It's nice as an idea,”

London continues. “But it's only people in the industry who think, ‘Wow, I never thought of velvet sweatpants as made to order.’”

It's important to note that not all of the new “couture” lines are completely plebeian. Some even carry on the handcrafted, custom-fitted tradition, albeit in a less refined fashion. Flipping through the current Morgana Femme Couture catalog, for example, one is immediately struck by the sheer number of tattoos sported by the lingerie-clad models, some of whom pose languidly against a *Monsters*-style hearse. But here's the backstory: The founder of the line, 32-year-old Morgana Breadman, has been sewing since the age of six. The bulk of her work, corsetry, is completely custom.

“I do it all by hand—all the beading, lace appliques, all that,” says Breadman. “And I consider that couture. Couture is just basically French for ‘sewing.’ That's all it really is. But it's also about very expensive fabrics and attention to detail. A lot of care goes into it. And it's very time-consuming. My corsets are all done by me, by hand. So I do consider myself a couturier, in that sense.”

As such, Breadman has a bit of a bee in her bonnet when similarly named lines take the easy way out. “They might only be T-shirt makers—it's not couture at all,” she says. “It's just mass printing, and they slap the word ‘couture’ on the end of their name. Often I wonder if they even know what ‘couture’ means.” And if they do know, do they even care? Until another trendy fashion word appears—and “bespoke” is harlequin down the tracks—there's every chance that “couture” will suffer the same fate as that other French goodie, “champagne.”

“The problem with ‘couture’ is that if you leap to the defense of the word, people will perceive you as some horrible elitist,” says Doonan, who leaps nonetheless.

“The value of the couture comes from the fact that it preserves the notion of craft in fashion,” he says. “It's not the fact that it's a bunch of rich ladies larding money at the Paris collections. And it's not the fact that the misuse of the word is blurring the distinction between a dress from Strawberry that's \$19.99 and one that's \$40,000. I don't care about any of that.”

“Crafts are holy,” Doonan continues. “I feel exactly the same way about couture as I do [about] old hippies in Big Sur making tooled leather belts or American Indians making beautiful blankets. Exactly the same reverence should be attached [to couture]. Not because it's posh. Not because it's expensive. But because it's done by hand, and it's a dying art.”

—DANA DOONAN

“The idea was a spoof on couture,” says Nash-Taylor of naming the wildly popular collection. “Because we're really the opposite of couture, which is sort of 80 hours to make one dress versus 80 hours to make 8,000 T-shirts.”



# 15 Official Paris-Based Couturiers

ADELINE ANDRÉ

ALEXANDRE VAUTHIER

ALEXIS MABILLE

CHANEL

CHRISTIAN DIOR

FRANCK SORBIER

GIAMBATTISTA VALLI

JEAN PAUL GAULTIER

JULIEN FOURNIÉ

MAISON MARGIELA

MAURIZIO GALANTE

SCHIAPARELLI

STÉPHANE ROLLAND

GIVENCHY

YIQING YIN

# Couturiers Based Elsewhere

ARMANI PRIVÉ

ATELIER VERSACE

ELIE SAAB

VALENTINO

VIKTOR & ROLF

# Couture Clients

The total universe of clients numbers about 2000, with only 200 highly active purchasers.

They are most likely to reside in:

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

RUSSIA

CHINA

KOREA

BRAZIL



Daphne Guinness

# Daphne!



# Schiap's Modern Compromise: “Prêt à Couture”

Along with classic Couture, Schiap is also experimenting with a mashup of Couture + Prêt à Porter dubbed “Prêt à Couture.”



# “Schiap 2.0” Designers



Christian Lacroix

# “Schiap 2.0” Designers



Marco Zanini

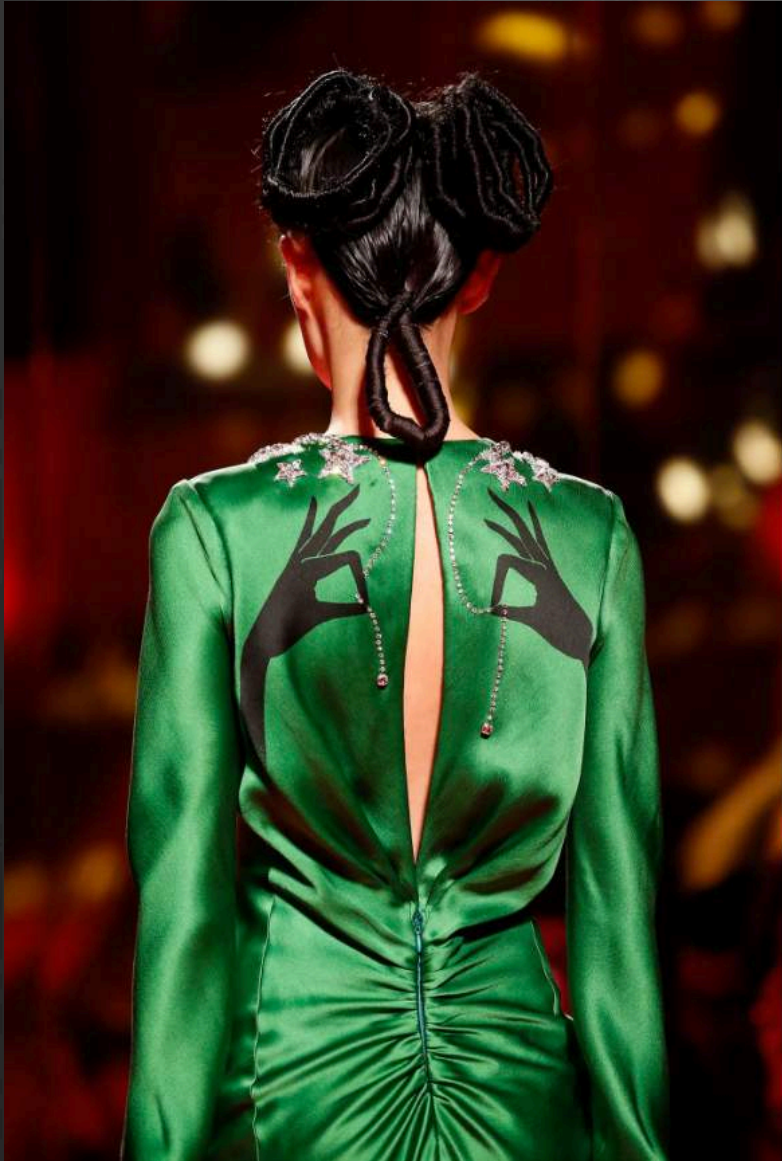


Farida Khelfa



Bertrand Guyon

# Tweaking the House Codes



Trompe l'Oeil

# Tweaking the House Codes



“Handsy” - New



“Handsy” - Archival

# Tweaking the House Codes



Lobster



Skeleton

# Tweaking the House Codes



Gold Braiding + Pasties

# Tweaking the House Codes



Cosmos



Draping



Pink

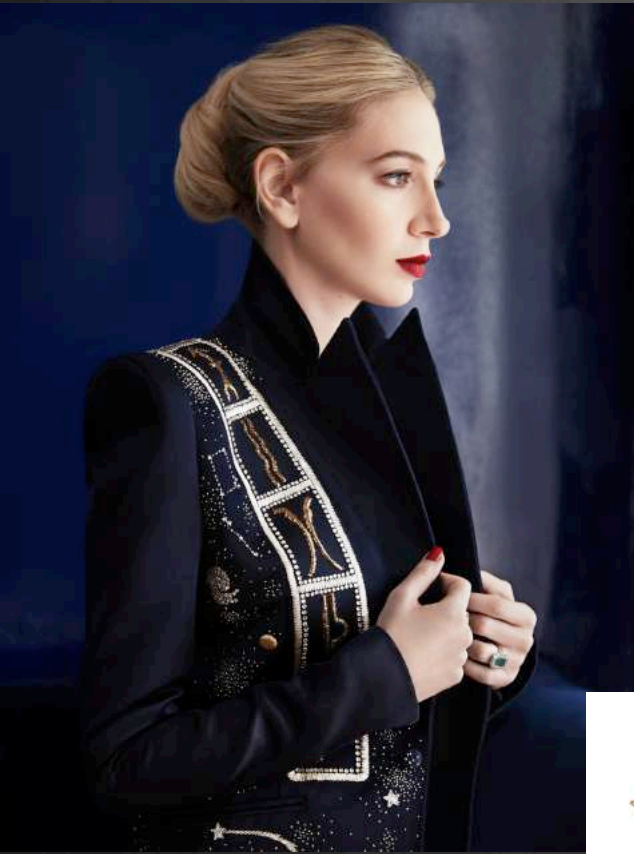


Surrealism



Pockets

# Tweaking the House Codes



Zodiac Jacket

# Tweaking the House Codes

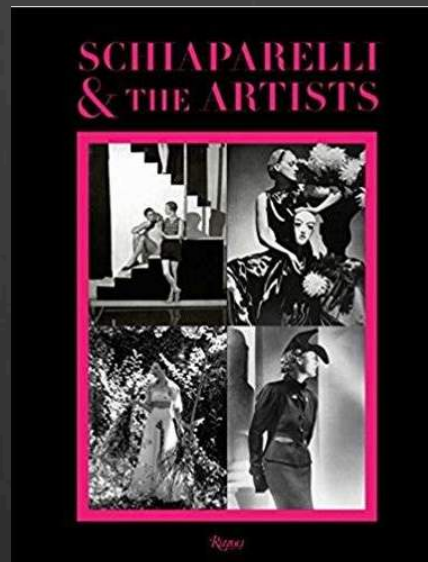


Golden Palm Jacket



# Still Driving the Cultural Dialogue

## SCHIAPARELLI AND PRADA: IMPOSSIBLE CONVERSATIONS



# Still Capturing Our Imagination



# Maison Schiaparelli

Automne/Hiver 2017



Fin

