

Forever VALENTINO



He may be approaching retirement, but the Italian couturier has just launched another timeless fragrance, Valentino 'V'

WORDS KATY NELSON

His name is synonymous with breathless praise for gowns on the red carpet, where A-list stars pause to gush about his designs. He is frequently spotted with supermodels, actors and royals holidaying on his yacht or presenting his couture collections in Paris, while his ready-to-wear stores grace the chic shopping districts of Europe, America and Asia.

At the age of 73, Italian designer Valentino Garavani, known to the world simply as 'Valentino', sits atop an enviable fashion and fragrance empire. His timeless clothing is a staple of the world's richest wardrobes, and his collections, both vintage and current, are worn by actors at the Oscars, including this year's winner of the best supporting actress gong, Cate Blanchett. He dressed Jacqueline Kennedy for her wedding to Aristotle Onassis, and he has been a friend and fashion guru to many celebrities, including Audrey Hepburn, Jennifer Aniston, Jennifer Lopez, Julia Roberts, Penelope Cruz and Gwyneth Paltrow.

With the recent release of his latest fragrance, Valentino 'V', (available on-board for £29) it is clear that, despite reports of the designer approaching retirement, the Valentino brand is going to be around for years to come.

From apprentice to legend

Born on May 11, 1932, in the village of Voghera, south of Milan, Valentino was drawn to fashion from an early age. His parents supported his studies at Milan's Accademia dell'Arte and in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and the Ecole de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture. He apprenticed under French couturiers Jean Dessès and Guy Laroche before opening an atelier (workshop) in Rome with business partner Giancarlo Giammetti in 1959, aged 27.

Hollywood stars like Elizabeth Taylor, one of the original 'Val's Gals', as his well-known female

Clockwise from top: Valentino; his catwalk creations



clients are known, discovered Valentino in the '60s. In 1967 he received the fashion world's equivalent of an Oscar, the Neiman Marcus Prize, in Dallas. And his enormously successful 'White Collection' in 1968 cemented his reputation and debuted his trademark 'V' label.

By the end of the decade, Valentino was recognised as the top name in Italian couture and was admired for his French training. In 1996, he was awarded a Cavaliere del Lavoro, similar to a knighthood, by the Italian government in recognition of his business success. And in 2000, the Council of Fashion Designers of America presented him with a lifetime achievement award.

In 1998, Giammetti and Valentino sold their empire to the Italian conglomerate Holding di Partecipazioni (hdP) for an estimated £211 million, who in turn sold the label to a luxury goods company, the Marzotto Group, in 2002. Valentino remains the chief designer. However, at the winter



From left: Jennifer Aniston, Penelope Cruz, Cate Blanchett and Jennifer Lopez are all fans of Valentino



2005/06 show in March it was reported that the designer might present his last collection in January 2006 and discussions are allegedly taking place as to who will take over when Valentino retires.

The essence of elegance

Valentino is innately insightful of feminine elegance, and he releases a bit more of this knowledge with each fragrance and couture collection. "A woman must cause heads to turn when she enters a room. That's the inspiration for my fragrances and always will be," says Valentino, who launched his first eponymous fragrance in 1978 with a gala performance by Russian-American dancer and choreographer Mikhail Baryshnikov at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris.

Of this year's perfume, Valentino says, "I saw the need for a new feminine fragrance that reflects and celebrates contemporary femininity – powerful, beautiful, complex – but always elegant... for me elegance is the balance between proportion, emotion and surprise." V's diamond-shaped bottle reflects Valentino's attentiveness to detail. "The packaging mirrors the strength of my tailoring – sophisticated yet feminine," says the designer.

Fragrance experts at Procter & Gamble partnered with Valentino to produce a memorable fragrance with woody, floral and oriental notes. Base notes of mysterious ambergris, sandalwood and vanilla linger as soft, sophisticated aphrodisiacs. A blend of orange blossom, rose petals and Frangipani flowers gives V a floral heart, while top notes of mandarin, pink grapefruit and green fig inspire desire.

In the 'V' print and television commercial campaigns, Russian model Eugenia Volodina emerges as a modern goddess, wearing only a red-feather mask, and besieged by hundreds of fluttering red Vs. Red is the designer's signature colour; some even refer to his favourite shade as 'Valentino Red'.

"Red is a fascinating colour. It is life, the blood of death, passion, love, and the ultimate remedy of sadness," he reveals recalling a night at the opera aged 17 where he met a grey-haired woman dressed in red velvet from head to toe. "Amid all the colours worn by women, she appeared to me unique—standing out in all her splendour. I have never forgotten her. For me she became the red goddess."

Volodina reveals that modelling for 'V' certainly made her feel like a goddess. "Valentino is so special because he can transform every woman into a shining, glamorous goddess... Valentino's clothes make me confident in my femininity. It felt the same way to be wearing just the red feather mask during the shoots."

The quiet King

Nicknamed by the fashion press the "King of Fashion" for his runway successes, Valentino lives quietly and turns down many invitations for nights on the town. "I was never completely crazy

"A woman must cause heads to turn when she enters a room – that's the inspiration for 'V'"



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Valentino 'V' is available to buy in the shopfloor section of the magazine on page 115

to go out," he says. "I don't drink, I don't smoke and those places [nightclubs] are boring. I prefer a calm life." Valentino only eats out at lunchtime – personal chefs at his homes in Versailles, Rome, Capri, Tuscany, London, Gstaad, New York and on his yacht, *TM Blue One*, prepare Mediterranean cuisine without cream or butter. "My ideal meal is quite simple – a light pasta, vegetable salad, a piece of apple or fig tart perhaps, a little red wine, some little cookies and mineral water.

Everything has to be made in my home although I would allow chocolates from Belgium and eat only a very few" the designer says revealing that he considers "a little self denial to be healthy". ©