

►consisting of women's screams; an emotionally draining experience. A bridal gown was displayed with the bride facing a window; her gazing through the transparent space implied communication while her train followed her climbing the steps, making her moment, doubly symbolic.

#### THE VALENTINO LEGACY FOR THE FASHION WORLD

Valentino's 'Haute Couture' is synonymous with elegance, almost reminiscent of Hollywood and bygone eras. Equally, viewing his Paris spring/summer 2008 ready-to-wear collection this month, his garments seem timeless and the same goes for his 2007 Autumn/Winter collection. His winter clothes are steadfast and consistent. Blacks, browns, pinstripes and wools with fur trimmings, animal prints and leather accessories worn with lace blouses. They could have been made at any time from the 1940s to the present with no wearable age groups barred. His models sport curly, long hair in a tribute to femininity which has been the hallmark of everything he has produced. Valentino knows how to dress a woman and knows how a woman wants to be dressed. It is no wonder he received a standing ovation for his styles for

gowns is an innovation for Valentino. Ruffled edges on dresses along with candy striped shoes on gold platforms, the collection engrosses 60s, 70s and 80s influences, all in one. It's almost as if Valentino wanted to utilise everything in his repertoire. Glamour seems to be something his clients have grown to expect when they invest in a Valentino gown and when it comes to evening wear, that is exactly what they get.

Marking the end of an era, this was Valentino's first fashion show outside Paris for 16 years followed by a grand gala dinner at the Parco dei Daini, in Villa Borghese. One thousand guests attended including Karl Lagerfeld, Giorgio Armani, Tom Ford, Mario Testino and Donatella Versace. Gina Lollobrigida and Joan Collins wore red, as many other guests chose to no doubt as a mark of respect.

#### RISE TO FASHION SUPERSTAR

Valentino Clemente Ludovico Garavani (born 11 May 1932 in Voghera, Lombardy) moved from Italy to Paris at the age of 17 to study fashion. Starting at Ecole des Beaux Arts and Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne, he then gained experience working in various fashion houses such

## 'KING OF THE RED CARPET' TAKES FINAL BOW

At 75 years of age, Valentino, the man who has spent the last 45 years dressing the world's most beautiful women, has decided to retire. Grand parties and elaborate fashion shows have followed in celebration of the designer who started his career in Paris at the age of 17.

Nicola Ferlei Brown

To honour Valentino's designs that have spanned more than four decades, Rome recently celebrated the designer with an exhibition at the Ara Pacis. 'Valentino 45 Years Of Style' was a collection of 300 specifically chosen gowns from the private collections of his top clients. 'Red', according to Valentino is the only colour after black and white, a view firmly reflected by its choice as the exhibition's theme colour. This primary colour dominated the first room of the exhibition. It is also the colour of the 1965 red crepe dress encased in a giant red perspex box outside the exhibition on the steps of the Ara Pacis, and just so happens to be the colour of Valentino's bulletproof Mercedes. His nick name by the way, is 'Rosso'.

#### THE COMPLETE EXHIBITION SPACE

This unique exhibition was arranged according to colour, with dresses displayed as if according to a data structure whose every element is indexed. Themes included black and white, red and other colour blends. Mannequins were suspended from the ceilings and appeared to be literally 'climbing the walls' and floating in mid air in a sea of bodies which reached out to you in suspended applause. The exhibition also featured a soundtrack ►►

next season. One is truly left wondering how a man of such talent could possibly ever stand down and, moreover, what the fashion world will do without him.

#### THE LAST COLLECTION

The historical significance of Valentino's influence over the ever-changing Fashion world is largely due to his use of undeniably classic designs. Feminine, structured and chic, they can be relied upon to stand the test of time. Times change, however, and in comparison to his contemporaries and their willingness to test extremes, you sense that perhaps Valentino's sense of self preservation is equally prevalent in his designs. Perhaps he simply has no need to re-invent himself, indeed why should he stray from the beautifully tried and tested? In his final collection he has produced some interesting mixtures of styles and there is an element of daring too. We see puffed sleeves, hems and necklines, on otherwise classically tailored dresses, skirts, and blouses, in white, and black and white polka dot, as well as concertina cut cuffs and collars. Opulent colours matched his equally colourful catwalk, from fusia pinks to pale chiffons, lilac, lemon, baby blues and virtually every shade of the colour spectrum being utilised. The use of sheer blockwork on

as Jaques Fath, Balenciaga, Jean Desses and Guy Laroche, later returning to Italy in 1959 to open his own fashion house in Rome's Via Condotti. At this time, by coincidence, he met and formed a lasting relationship with Giancarlo Giammetti (still honorary president of the Valentino Fashion House) and through his business and marketing skills, they jointly built and expanded the Valentino fashion empire. His client list reads like a who's who of the international jet set and he is known as the 'king of the red carpet' on account of almost every film star having worn a 'Valentino' at the Oscars. He has been awarded the highest accolades for his contribution to fashion both in Italy and France, thus, making his position irrefutable.

For a man equally renowned for his flamboyant lifestyle, he has chosen to leave with the party in full swing. A fitting follow up on the fashion extravaganza that kicked off in July this summer and ended with the launch of his latest house perfume Rock'n Rose Couture, Valentino's fashion farewell was provided by a tribute book by Vanity Fair editor Matt Tyrnauer published by Taschen. An artist of course can never stop creating, but he has chosen to take leave of the global fashion world while he is still at the top. ■

