

Paris : Capital for Fashion-Designers from All Over the World

Around 1860s Charles Frederick Worth was the first to have his models parade. It meant the birth of haute couture. His father was English and his nationality was "Parisian". Since then, and without any interruption, Paris has remained the unique, magic stage for matters of fashion, where everything is done and undone.

FOLLOWING in the wake of Worth, one fashion-designer, Paul Poiret, was to set the tone for a truly French haute-couture. The Belle Epoque brought British and American designers to the forefront. These included Busvine, O' Rossen, Redfern and even the venerable Creed. The most famous of them remains Mainbocher, the American from Chicago who converted Paris to the comfort of American classicism. He was joined by another Briton Edward Molyneux, a First World War veteran who had moved onto fashion and whose slate-blue tweed outfit was to clothe the American Wallis-Simpson for her fatal meeting with King Edward VIII.

Paris in the period between the two wars also celebrated Italian fashion-designers. Nina Ricci, from Turin, created her fashion house there in 1932, one year before the countess Vera Borea opened her salons. Moreover, all of Europe was there. After all, Jean Desses, the specialist of draped styles was Greek. Ara Frenkian was Armenian and the great names in fashion photography were of Russian origin (Hoyningen-Huene) or American (Man Ray).

In 1930, Princess Faucigny-Lucinge was able to congratulate herself. "Foreigners will always come to our country, as there is a particularly immortal atmosphere here". Indeed, the following decade saw some of them dictating to taste. It was the Roman Elsa Schiaparelli who lit up Paris with her highly modern fantasies and the Spaniard Cristobal Balenciaga, the austere lover of the beautiful, whose quest for the formal was to stand out. After the purgatory of the Occupation, queues once again grew outside Chanle's shop in



The Japanese fashion designer Kenzo and his models, one of the numerous designers who have chosen to live in Paris.

by Jacques Brunel

Rue Cambon. This time it was the G I s. The sophisticated chic of Christian Dior was ready to once more turn Paris into the capital of fashion. The foreigners were spoken of less. Schiaparelli was running out of steam. Balenciaga managed to hang on. Pierre Cardin, an Italian, invented ready-to-wear fashions. Paco Rabanne (a Spaniard, Basque) dressed Brigitte Bardot in a transparent coat of mail. The breath of fashion indeed blew from England in the 60s, under the impetus of Mary Quant, the inventor of the miniskirt.

Paris Continues to Draw Foreign Fashion-Designers

It was not until the following decade that Paris once again became a great draw for foreign fashion-designers. This time, the candidates came from far-off Japan. Kenzo Takada has chosen France because his love with Paris, the "Nouvel Observateur" wrote in 1970. This apostle of colour, who was joined by his friend Irie, a specialist in knitwear, and Hanae Mori, Kurosawa's costume designer, did not at

all prefigure those who were to be called "The Japanese". Rei Kawakubo (designer for Comme des Grçons), Issey Miyake and Yohji Yamamoto would impose a new sobriety right into the 1980s (with black and white) which recreated the aesthetics of clothes. Furiously planet-wide, the Paris of the 1980s wore the colours of the Italian Popy Moreni as well as the African fabrics of the Cameroonian Ly Dumas or the plunging necklines of the Spanish Sybilla. For 14th July 1989, the national anthem, the

"Marseillaise" for the Commemoration of the Bicentenary of the French Revolution was sung by the Black American singer Jessie Norman, dressed by the Tunisian fashion-designer Azzedine Alaïa. It is almost a symbol and one can hardly be surprised when Paris shelters both the Norwegian fashion-designer Per Spook and the child of immigrants Ted Lapidus. Just as the Dane Erik Mortensen reigns at Balmain, a German designer from Hamburg, Karl Lagerfeld, was chosen in 1984 to take over the succession of Coco, at Chanel. The Italian Gianfranco Ferré was soon to join Dior and the Englishman John Galiano, Givenchy. Ahead of its time, fashion has succeeded in its globalisation.

Although certain Italian and Japanese fashion designers continue to create in their countries of origin, Paris, the headquarters of the powerful ready-to-wear fair, remains the irreplaceable showcase in which to display their collections.

In the middle of the 1990s, its magnetism operated even further afield with the arrival of the Korean Lee Young-Hee and the "second Japanese generation" (Issey Miyake's students such as Kozuke Tsumura).

But, in the city where criticism and praise take little heed of one's Origins, are not all fashion designers made to feel at home? This is what Sacha Guitly thought. "A Spaniard cannot be a Londoner. An Englishman cannot be a Berliner. An Albanian cannot be a Parisian. In order to be that, it is not a matter of being born in Paris, nor even in France. It takes something else. One has to be adopted by everyone without anybody having spoken about it."

Cinema and Television

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and German cultural channel bet on this film at a low price, and won.

Without offering a single issue, television presents a choice of channels and of vocation. The programme schedule of television reflects this diversity. Private channels such as TF1 or M6 give priority to popular cinema. France 3 and Arte, which have a cultural vocation, show films which are less intended for the general public. France 2 comes between these two extremes. France 3 has thus patiently "created a space for quality cinema which rejects degraded films" as Patrick Brion, who is in charge of the cinema unit, explains. Since the beginning of 1996, once a month at 8.30 pm, a cycle of films by Marcel Pagnol shows the power of attraction of old films on television viewers.

Co-productions of Films are Sometimes Fruitful

The most highly perfected barometers, in particular the number of admissions in cinema auditoriums, cannot predict and guarantee the success of a film on television. Co-productions by television channels such as L 627 by Bertrand Tavernier or Un Coeur en Hiver by Claude Sautet (France 3) did not achieve the expected success on television. Conversely, a film which went unnoticed when it came out in the cinema, Pas d'Amour sans Amour by Evelyne Dress, shown on France 2 at 8.30 pm scored the highest television viewer-

ship rating of the year. A film can thus gain from an evening of mediocre programmes on the other channels. But, on the whole, cinema professionals "do not believe in the revelations of cinema on television". Psychological, dramatic, reflective or intimist films would find it difficult to find favour on television. Yet, television makes a considerable effort for all kinds of productions. In 1995, France 2 and France 3 co-produced 22 and 15 films respectively. Sometimes their wagers proved fruitful. France 3 thus co-produced Les Visiteurs (They weren't born yesterday) with Christian Clavier which was a resounding success in cinema auditoriums. Viewership laws paradoxically encourage television channels to schedule more traditional productions late, such as Le Souper by Edouard Molinaro at 11.30 pm and Un Monde sans Pitie by Eric Rochant at 10.30 pm.

Film festivals, which are not limited to the great event of Cannes, provide an opportunity for young directors and independent producers to become known and to initiate links with television. Far from being a simple thing, getting into the television circuit today is a matter for great experienced producers who are skilled in the complexity of the financial mechanisms and arrangements. It is only by appealing to one of these great production structures that Vassili Silovic, a young director, was able to benefit from the support of Arte and of Channel 5

(the channel of knowledge) for his film about Orson Welles' last years, made from archives which had not been exploited before. An independent producer, Jean-Paul Viullin, for his part, failed in his quest for television backing. His film dealt, on a positive tone, with the problems of the suburbs through the story of two young people from different backgrounds. Ticket d'amour tarif étudiant did not win the television channels over. Without their support, this film was made with a budget of 5 million francs (1 million dollars).

This proves that, in France today, it is still possible to do without television for small budget films. However, distribution remains a risky business. Besides co-productions, production and distribution companies try to anticipate the future reception of television channels before making a film, in order to be able to negotiate the purchase of rights more surely, later on, although they do not always receive a firm offer.

Far from being its enemy, television contributes to distributing cinema films and is actively involved in their production (100 to 150 films a year). Moreover, French cinema seems to get on well with television as confirmed by the clear increase in the number of admissions to cinema auditoriums for French films in 1995. Television is thus an essential tool to produce films which are able to rival with American productions.

Fireworks a Must

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United States and the hundredth anniversary of the Statue of Liberty in New York.

The Magic of Computerized Firework Displays

The introduction of colour in fireworks was also achieved thanks to a Ruggieri. Later, his engineers combined their magic with music. The tones of Vivaldi, Mahler and Haendel accompanied the bursts of stars, the Roman Candles and the Merging gold and silver fountains.

In order to harmonize the sound and the light, the firm

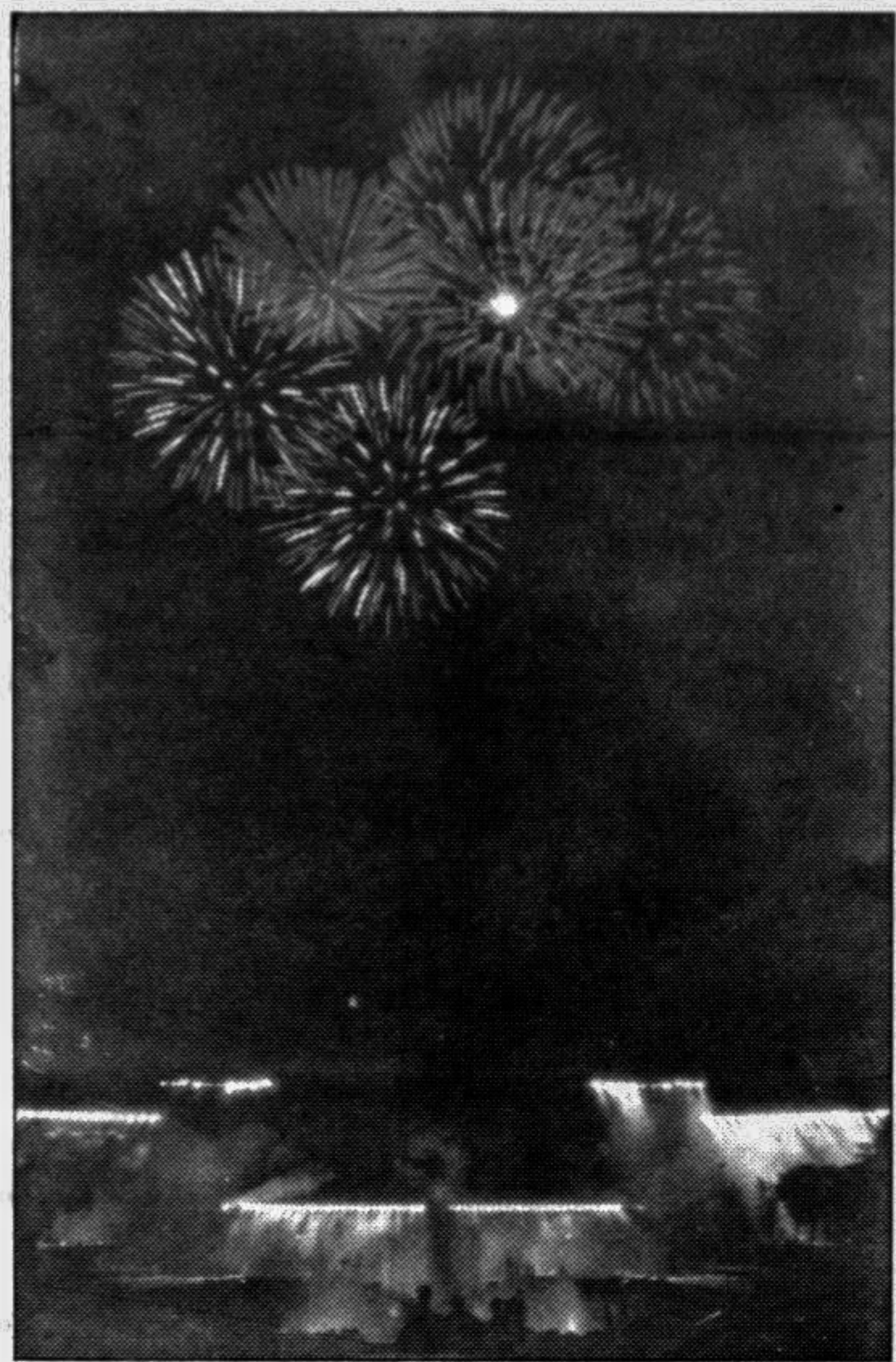
has developed a computer programme which makes it possible to optimize the synchronisation. Such firework displays today require the chief of firing to be an orchestra conductor and a director of staging at the same time. From his control desk, he directs the teams in charge of the fireworks, the music, the laser effects, the projection of pictures and even the water-ballets.

Under the devoutly preserved name of its founders, the old family firm has become a flourishing world-famous public limited company. It is located in Montoux in the South East of France and em-

loys 220 people to manufacture 1,200 different items including rockets, flare and all kinds of fire-fountains for firework displays all over the world.

Last year, Ruggieri set off 5,000 fireworks. The company, which is far ahead of its French and foreign competitors has risen to the position of champion in the area of exports. In 1988, it was admitted into the prestigious Club of Number Ones in their speciality. Even Mickey Mouse relies on its technique for the magical firework displays in its Disneyland and Disneyworld theme parks.

"Ruggieri, which is the founder of a "French school" of fireworks, is keen to develop its reputation throughout the world," its chairman, Jean



A firework display, organised by Paris City Hall, in the Trocadero Gardens for the 14th July. (photo: Paris City Hall)

Latour, explains. "Its creativity extends to all areas from chemical research to develop new effects and new colours, to perfecting firing techniques and artistic innovation in the staging."

Its researchers continually work on perfecting superb ephemeral architectural creations which will vanish in the sky. Some of the firm's compositions, with their highly evocative names, are marked with the seal of aesthetic creativity and are true masterpieces of firework art. These include Vulcan's Organ (5 coloured volcanoes with sound effects), the Havenly

Garden (25 comets bursting in a shower), Jupiter's Dance (25 comets with a crackling effect) and, for the grand finale, the Amazonian Bouquet consisting of 304 coloured projectiles with thunder and lighting, more than 96 rockets firing a burst of stars, and more than 10 rockets filling the sky with a sparkling shower.

It is enough to satisfy the arsonist who, according to Dostoyevsky, slumbers in the depths of every man. "I doubt", wrote the author of "The Possessed", "that it is possible to watch a fire without feeling a certain amount of pleasure in it."

The Ombudsman

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ing department. If this is followed by no effect, he can go so far as to present the criticizable dealings in an annual report given to the President of the Republic and to Parliament and made public. He also proposes certain reforms in the administrative services which appear necessary.

The "Claimants"

In 1994, 44,334 people asked for help from the mediator. Out of this total, 39,000 cases were dealt with. "Even the 'claimants' who did not obtain satisfaction because their case was not in the area of competence of the ombudsman, generally gained from the procedure by benefiting from some information or advice which enabled them to have a better grasp of their situation and to correctly redirect their action," a spokesman at the mediator's office points out.

Cases submitted to the ombudsman cover all areas. They can concern the victim of

an administrative mistake who comes up against difficulties in getting compensation, or a private individual who is wrongly refused a building permit, or even a transsexual whose status the administration refuses to modify.

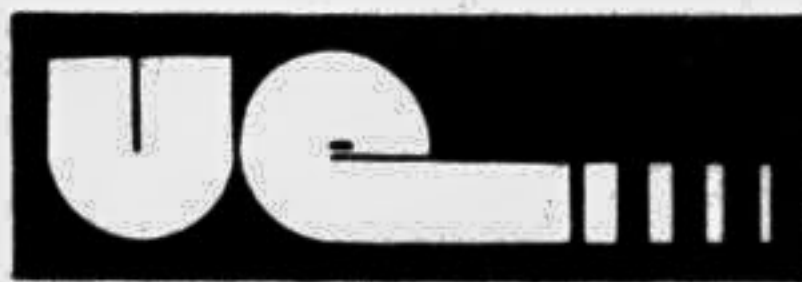
The number of cases dealt with by the ombudsman increases by about 10 per cent a year. To help him in his task, he has one, or sometimes two regional delegates, per department. These, working or retired high civil servants meet in the Prefectures.

As it has functioned for 22 years, the institution of the mediator has taken on an important place in the range of reforms aimed at bringing the administration and private individuals closer together. It results bear witness to the fact that it satisfies their thirst for participation, for direct contact and for the personalisation of the exercise of power. It thus effectively completes the jurisdictional measures for defending human rights and those of the citizen.



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