

VALENTINO

-BY SUSAN MICHALS

Valentino is one of the greatest seducers of women in our lifetime. Certainly not in the traditional Byronic sense, but in a much more important realm — he knows what they want, and he gives it to them, and for that, they love him forever.

Over the last fifty years, he has created some of the most iconic works of art ever to grace the female body. His agenda is rather simple — all he expects is perfection. Every single one of his gowns are made by hand, from Jackie Onassis's georgette and lace wedding dress to the glorious black and white gown worn by Julia Roberts when she accepted the Academy Award for *Erin Brockovich*. That's why it is so surprising that this perfectionist allowed a documentary crew to follow him around over a period of nearly two years to produce the brilliant and occasionally hilarious documentary, *Valentino: The Last Emperor*.

This film is not a fashion movie. Sure, there's plenty of eye candy — opulent homes, glorious gowns, and his family of six pugs. But after his interview with Valentino and partner Giancarlo Giammetti, (August 2004, *Vanity Fair*) director Matt Tyrnauer realized he had an opportunity to document a relationship that went way beyond the glamour. "To make a straight-ahead fashion movie was not interesting to me; it was the human story of these two men who had built this

life and career and empire together." Valentino and Giammetti met in the early 60's, and what began as a love affair turned a personal and professional partnership that has lasted nearly 50 years. While the romance didn't last, their infallible connection has remained steadfast. Tyrnauer admits theirs was one of the most symbiotic relationships he'd ever seen. "The fact that these two men have stayed together...most marriages don't last this long." Still, they have the repartee at times, like one of those couples showcased in *When Harry Met Sally*. "You look a bit too tan," mentions Giammetti. "Tan? No!" retorts Valentino. Giammetti quickly responds: "Well, a little less wouldn't hurt."

But after two years of filming, the perfectionist initially wasn't thrilled with the final product as it didn't show him as, well, perfect. "You will seem like someone that's way too entitled; you have to be human," recounts Tyrnauer of his conversation with Valentino. "... because you're an artist, and this shows your creative struggles, people will love you — because they will see what made you who you are." Fortunately, Valentino acquiesced. The film, debuted at the Venice Film Festival, and Valentino sat in the balcony above. When the film ended, all 1,500 present gave him a standing ovation. He burst into tears.



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The Last Couturier