



# Charles & Patricia Lester

## Look Book



All Pictures and designs in this look book are the property of  
Charles & Patricia Lester



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## **Charles and Patricia Lester - Designer collections**

Their use of colour is unsurpassed, as are the innovative techniques; which they have developed over the years. Every idea and invention is experimented with until the evolved process is perfected. Beyond the concept of couture - they paint into each piece of cloth the shadows and light that an artist would use to show the richness and luminosity of a garment, casting spells of colour and dimension that deceive the mind and the eye. The fabrics are then crafted by their small skilled team into extraordinary pieces. All the work is completed 'in house' including the painting, hand printing and hand pleating as well as the final construction. Unhindered by the constraints of conventional sewing traditions, the clothes are moulded onto the body using the qualities of the cloth to dictate the method of construction. The clothes are sensual and minimalist, uncluttered and refined in shaping.

Patricia's hallmark - meticulous attention to detail - has attracted an impressive number of admirers, who appreciate the craftsmanship as well as the 'inspired' qualities of the collections. They are luxurious clothes that touch the spirituality and femininity of the wearer as no other designer can. Royalty and icons of the film world and the pop world alike enjoy the unique fashion style of these designers.

The Lesters' passion for textiles has lead to the extension of the business into the film and opera world as well as an interesting home interior collection. They undertake commission work for theatre and interiors including costumes, tapestries, bedcovers, cushions, throws, screens and curtains. Pleated silks, sumptuous velvets, all painted and printed in such a way as to compliment the most exotic antiques or futuristic interiors. The textiles have a timeless quality, which adapt like a chameleon to any environment.







Velvet devore Square Arthur Coat  
over Pleated Silk Vest Two Piece



Pleated Silk Vest Two Piece



## Velvet devore Krystal Coat over Silk Two Piece





Velvet Jackie Coat and  
Rebecca Dress



Velvet Lucy Dress



Pleated Silk Tailcoat over Velvet Lucy Dress





Velvet Lady Jane Dress



Velvet and Pleated Silk Lucianna Dress



Long



Short



Velvet Devore Short Lucy  
Dress





Velvet Devore Overblouse



Pleated Silk Little Tudor Jacket





Slim Bias Velvet Skirt



Full Bias Velvet  
Patchwork Skirt





Pleated silk Summer Jacket



Velvet devore Krystal Coat over Pleated  
Silk Lily Dress





Velvet and Pleated Silk Lucianna  
Dress





Velvet devore Mistress Iris Dress



Velvet Little Eve Wrap jacket over  
Pleated Silk Two Piece



Velvet Vivaldi Coat with Metallic  
Gold Print

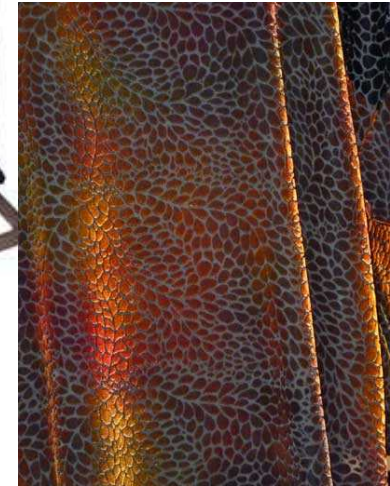




Velvet Fanette Dress with Metallic  
Gold Print



Velvet Devore Florence  
Coat





Pleated Silk Tailcoat over Marbled  
Silk Danuta Dress





Marbled Silk Danuta Dress



## Scarves and Shawls







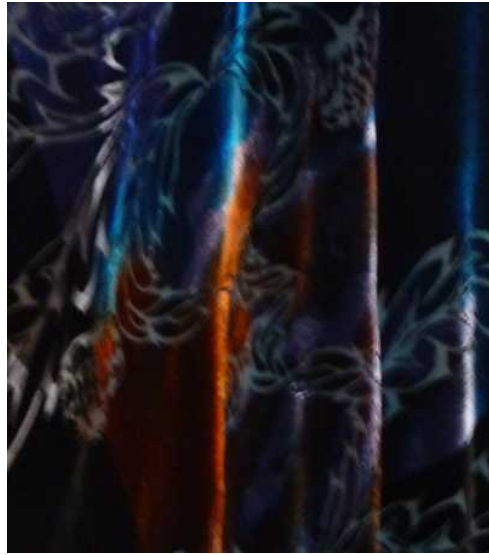








































# Hello Magazine



## EXQUISITE JEWELLERY FROM THE DUKE OF WESTMINSTER'S PRIVATE FAMILY COLLECTION MODELLED WITH UNIQUE EVENINGWEAR BY CHARLES AND PATRICIA LESTER

**W**andering around our stately homes, it is possible to get a taste of the sumptuous style in which the aristocracy once lived. But you are unlikely to get a peek into the private apartments where the families live today – and rarely would you get a glimpse of their precious family jewels.

Christie's Treasures of the North exhibition, in aid of the Christie's Against Cancer appeal, is a unique opportunity to view historic private possessions of distinguished noblemen like the Duke of

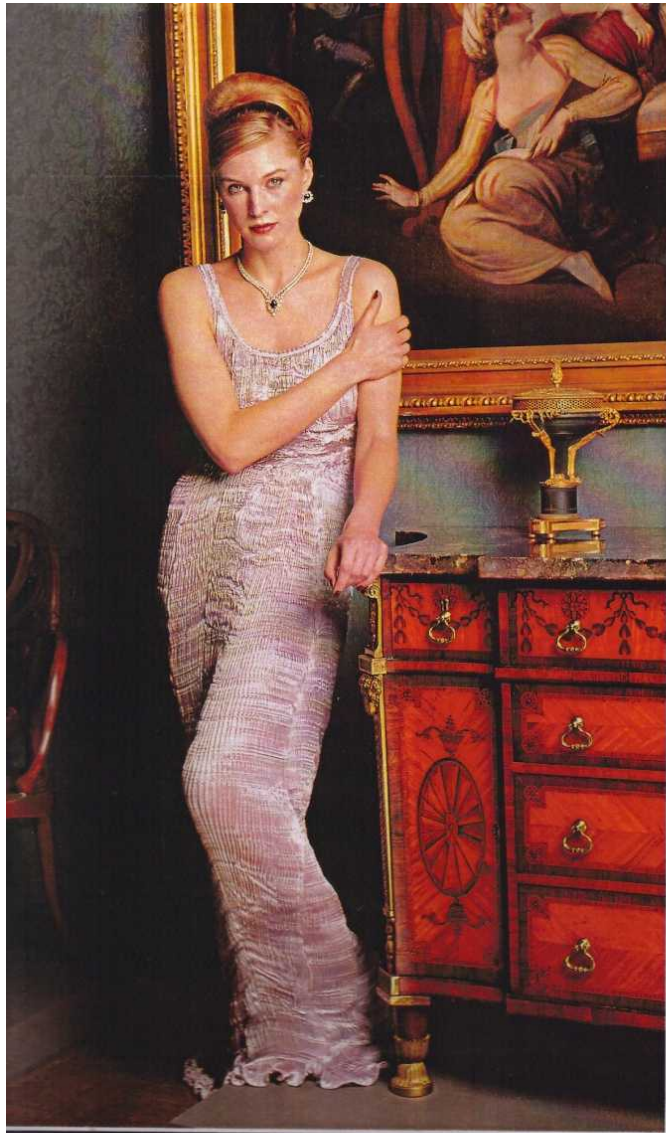
Devonshire, the Earl of Derby, Earl Halifax and the Earl of Lichfield. The exhibition also opens the jewel box belonging to the Duke of Westminster, who granted HELLO! special permission to photograph some of the Grosvenor family's exquisite jewellery.

The prizes in the Duke's collection are the two Art Nouveau-style tiaras by Carl Fabergé, both made in St Petersburg. One is a diamond-set tiara with tied floral displays, made early last century and now so fragile that it cannot be

Laura Roundell reclines on a George IV chair in a pearl and diamond tiara and princess vest dress (above). A diamond myrtle-leaf Fabergé tiara is complemented by a column dress and gossamer organza coat designed for the opera *Iris* (right)







Laura models a diamond and sapphire Asprey suite with an oyster column dress (above), and a Deco dress and devoré coat (right) with her favourite pieces – a Victorian necklace and earrings in diamonds and sapphires







A spinel and diamond necklace and earrings, which were once owned by a Russian princess and were given by the Duke of Westminster to his wife before their wedding, are enhanced by a smocked and beaded two-piece pleated outfit and Buddhist kimono coat (above)

moved. The other is a delicate diamond-set myrtle-leaf wreath tiara, inspired by the laurel wreaths worn by Roman emperors and later Napoleon, which is photographed here. Myrtle was attributed to the goddess Venus and her maidens, so it is appropriate that this tiara is worn by the family's brides.

The spinel and diamond necklace and earrings are part of a parure – also including a tiara and hair comb – that once belonged to Russian beauty Princess Ekaterina Pavlovna Bagration. It was presented by the current Duke to his future bride, who wore the tiara of oval and pear-shaped spinels at their wedding in 1978.

The private collection also includes a Victorian pearl and diamond tiara and two sapphire and

diamond necklaces: one a contemporary suite made by Asprey, and the other a Victorian piece made by Carlo Giuliano, a London-based artist-jeweller. This piece, with matching pendant earrings, is the favourite design of our model Laura Roundell, whose father Ricky Roundell, director of Christie's, spent the last three years pulling this exhibition together.

The delicacy of the myrtle-wreath tiara and richness of the spinel and diamond necklace are perfectly complemented by the rippling pleated silk dresses and velvet kimono jackets designed by Charles and Patricia Lester. The classical-column style of these hand-dyed dresses was a feature of the Directoire period around the time of Napoleon and the Art Nouveau era. The Lesters' designs are

snapped up by Enya, Whitney Houston and the Corrs, who are enchanted by the hand-coloured velvets, flattering shapes and shimmering quality.

The Lesters have designed for operas such as Mascagni's Japanese love story *Iris* and films like *Wings of A Dove* and Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet*. Such evocative designs are a perfect frame for the Grosvenor family's jewellery collection, especially when set amongst the Old Master paintings and rare antique furniture of Christie's special exhibition. **H**

STYLING & REPORT: FRANCESCA FEARON  
PHOTOS: PAUL MASSEY

Treasures of the North is at the Whitworth Gallery, University of Manchester, until April 9, 2000. For Ticketmaster, tel: 0990 344 44 44.



# ORIENT-EXPRESS

*Magazine*



*Fashion on  
The Wings of  
the Dove*



# DRESSED TO THRILL



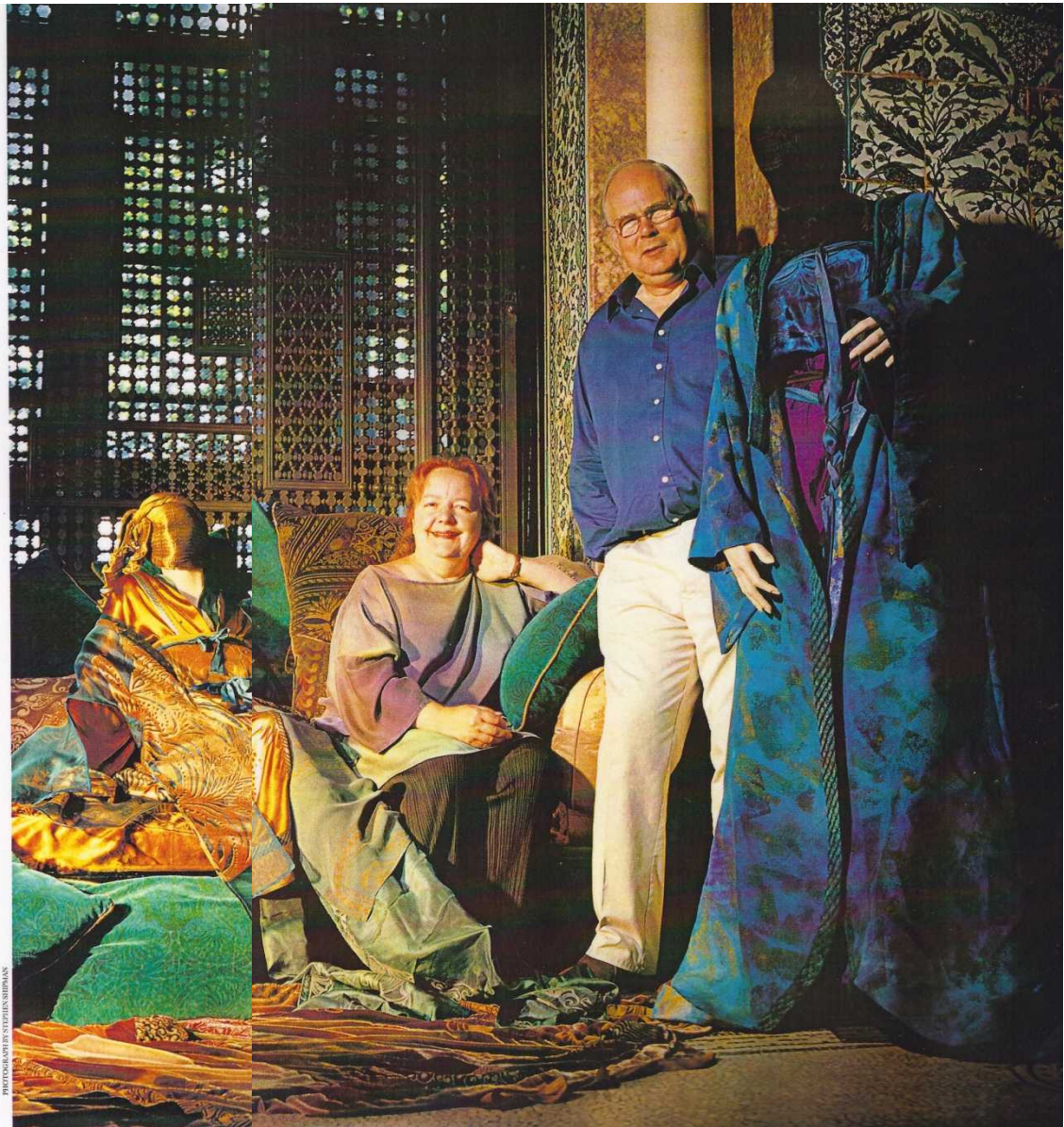
MOVIE STILL COLLECTION

In the new film  
*The Wings of the Dove*, above,  
 the costumes by  
 Charles and Patricia Lester  
 threaten to outshine  
 the stars whom they bedeck.  
 Lucille Grant  
 unpicks the story.

**T**he *Wings of the Dove*, a new film based on the Henry James novel, received a rapturous reception at this year's Venice Film Festival, and is now opening to applause around the world. Its cast includes a galaxy of famous names: for their many dedicated fans, however, the real stars of the film are the sumptuous costumes designed by Charles and Patricia Lester. This highly talented couple, pictured right, handpaint and screenprint silks and velvets, transforming them into garments that are

gorgeous, richly coloured works of art. Silks are hand-pleated to create the Lesters' remarkable signature couture dresses which gently mould to the body. According to Helena Bonham Carter, whose character in *The Wings of the Dove* wears a deep peacock dress: "They have a wonderful texture and shape, are incredibly comfortable to wear and are very flattering."

The film's costume designer, Sandy Powell, wanted to recreate the authentic costumes of the 1930s for the many scenes set in Venice and knew that Charles >



PHOTOGRAPH BY STEPHEN SHIPMAN









PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL MANNING/ESP

Previous pages: left, one of the Japanese-style costumes created for the opera "Iris"; a satin kimono in copper-gold inset with red silk, worn over a red-ember robe tied with a silk obi; right, one of the scene-stealing stars of the film "The Wings of the Dove" a pleated-silk vest dress, shown with a tailcoat in rainbow silver. Above, also starring in the film was Leonora, a fiery burnt-orange, pleated-silk column dress, worn with a handpainted devoré-velvet kimono in purple lustre.

and Patricia's designs would replicate the contemporary clothes of the period: "I had used one of the Lesters' dresses some years ago and knew their work," she explains, "the colours were beautiful and I wanted something similar to Fortuny." The latter is a parallel often drawn, but when Patricia Lester started designing 25 years ago she was unaware of the work of the pioneering Venetian craftsman Mario Fortuny, whose pleated silk sheaths shot to fame in the early years of this century, and are now collectors' items. "We have often been compared to him, but when we began I didn't know he existed," says Patricia. Charles and

Patricia do not consider themselves fashion designers, but artists and craftworkers. They create all their fabrics, clothes and soft furnishings from an idyllic location in Abergavenny, Wales. This setting suits them both perfectly and Charles says: "We like the tranquillity and have never wanted to move away." Everything is produced in the quixotically-named "Workhouse", an old Victorian workhouse, and their large Georgian house nearby in the picturesque valley of the River Usk.

Like all great couturiers they are dedicated to their craft. "We explored our own techniques of dyeing fabric, then added crude pleats which we ironed out to create a tree-bark effect," says Patricia. "It took two years to refine the process, in order to avoid the rigidity of machine-pleats and create a fabric that would mould around the body without clinging." Like Fortuny's famous *plissé* treatment of pleats, the process is now a closely guarded secret.

Their unique house style has resulted in clothes that are highly sought-after, earning them much respect both within the world of haute couture, and from serious collectors of textiles. Amy de la Haye, curator of the Victoria & Albert Museum's recent exhibition, *The Cutting Edge: 50 Years of British Fashion*, says: "Their clothes have a timeless appeal and their incredible craftsmanship is unparalleled."

The Lesters' collection is shown only in Paris and they are one of the best-selling couture labels in Neiman Marcus and Bergdorf Goodman in America, as well as Liberty in London. An impressive client list includes HRH Princess Michael of Kent, who has been a dedicated customer for 15 years, Barbra Streisand, Elizabeth Taylor, who wore a pale-green velvet robe over a finely pleated dress to her 65th birthday party this year, and Sian Phillips who recalls: "About five years ago, having admired the Lester clothes for some time, I asked the designer of a film I was working on if she would buy or hire a dress for me to wear. Once I put it on there was no question of my returning it and I bought it on the spot. Since then I have gradually acquired a small, cherished collection. It's heaven being able to pack full evening dress into an overnight bag!" British television star, Pauline Quirke, recently chose the "Anybody" jacket—so named because it suits anybody—in "ember" (burning-coal red) *devoré* velvet to wear at the 1997 National Television Awards in London: "The Lesters' clothes make me feel wonderful," she enthuses. "How often do you get a chance to wear a work of art?"

Unlike many other husband-and-wife partnerships, where one devotes time to design and the other to the financial side of the business, the Lesters work entirely in tandem, often for 12 hours a day, seven days a week. They believe their greatest asset is having everything in-house. All the fabric is cut and dyed in the Workhouse, which they have converted entirely themselves. What was once 14 rooms and a corridor has been transformed into the

screen-print room. Charles is in charge of the fabric developments, while Patricia supervises the sewing-room and keeps a vigilant watch over quality.

The Lesters settled in Wales 34 years ago, when Charles was employed by ICI as a textile physicist. He decided against relocating when the company moved to Harrogate in 1974 and instead trained as a teacher, specialising in Design, Craft and Technology. His knowledge helped him develop not only the fabrics and techniques, but also the necessary machinery. Patricia is responsible for the design of the clothes and is entirely self-taught. Unhindered by the traditional methods of formal training she creates clothes which are totally original. She designs directly on to a tailor's mannequin and everything is structured to mould to the shape of the body. "The only pattern in the factory is for a pair of trousers!" she says proudly.

The process of pleating means that many yards are required to complete one of their trademark dresses: "We are very generous with fabric. An average, simple dress takes eight yards and many of our velvets are cut on the bias, using even more material. Our most expensive garment was a pleated velvet coat which cost £7,000," explains Patricia. Producing a garment is also time consuming, as much of the work is by hand, in true couture fashion. An exceptional dress for HRH Princess Michael of Kent took 300 hours to create, being delicately beaded as well as pleated, and Patricia recalls one bedspread using 100 yards of fabric and taking three months to make.

The late Jean Muir was a designer whom Patricia Lester greatly admired for her total control and attention to detail: "She was a clothing engineer with an understanding of precision. She understood garment structure." Patricia also admires the work of Charles Frederick Worth, who established himself as the first couturier in Paris in 1858. However, she says: "Generally, I prefer to study artists and architects rather than designers. I like anything quirky or individual." Charles believes that the skills of art and craft are entirely bound together: "To be an artist you have to be a craftsman first." The Lesters appear to embrace the ideals made popular by William Morris and the Arts & Crafts Movement over 100 years ago. Patricia feels that many of the skills employed by our grandmothers to clothe their families and furnish their homes have now been lost.

In common with other highly creative people, they find inspiration from many sources. Photographs taken by Charles portray such images as the reflection of light on water, stained glass and dried leaves—all of which generate ideas for designs. Patricia also cites painting, one of her hobbies, as an influence on their work. The results of their artistic endeavours line the walls of their home, as well as being interpreted throughout their collection.

Patricia sees the typical Lester customer "as a woman who has the combination of budget and style, as well as the aesthetic



MI. ACTION



TOUGHMAN

The Lesters' dedicated clients include many famous names such as, top, Elizabeth Taylor, who wore this creation at her 65th birthday party and, above, Princess Michael of Kent, a client for 15 years. This intricately beaded and pleated dress took 300 hours to create, mostly by hand.

understanding and appreciation of what we do. These are women who are self-confident and do not feel that they have to be tied to the whims of fashion. They are sophisticated and make their own choices."

Both the Lesters admit to a passion for creativity, but they are also "creative with the business. We don't sit back and say we are artists." Charles believes that to be successful the ability to handle business techniques is every bit as important as artistic development. Patricia agrees: "You must have a talent to start with but, to succeed, you need to be good at both your craft and your business, one or the other is not enough." Their own consummate skills in both fields—particularly their extensive knowledge of textiles—is evidenced by their expansion into a range of interior accessories, including silk tapestries and bedspreads.

These accessories, which resemble antique textiles, with a particular affinity to 19th-century British Aestheticism, led to Charles and Patricia being invited to design fabrics for the refurbishment of Leighton House, in Kensington, London. Their involvement with the 1996 Leighton centenary exhibition included a stunning reconstruction of Lord Leighton's painting *Flaming June*. The exotic setting of Leighton House was also the venue for a recent exhibition showcasing the Lesters' textiles—tapestries, pictures and screens, all made with the same dedication to detail as their couture clothing. The exhibition also included 12 costumes from their first venture into theatrical design, the staging, last summer, of Mascagni's *Iris*—which has echoes of *Madame Butterfly*—at Holland Park.

The opera was a project which Charles admits was a huge undertaking. Emphasising their dedication to authenticity, the Lesters immersed themselves in the culture and principles of Japanese ceremonial and social dress. Their unique methods were combined with a strong, stylised Japanese theme using specially created fabrics for the 240 ensembles. Mike Volpe of the Kensington and Chelsea Libraries and Arts Services, who were responsible for putting on the opera, says: "They did a miraculous job in producing, in a relatively short space of time, many incredible pieces that worked so well on stage and are also of museum quality." The opera was very successful and may be repeated in the future.

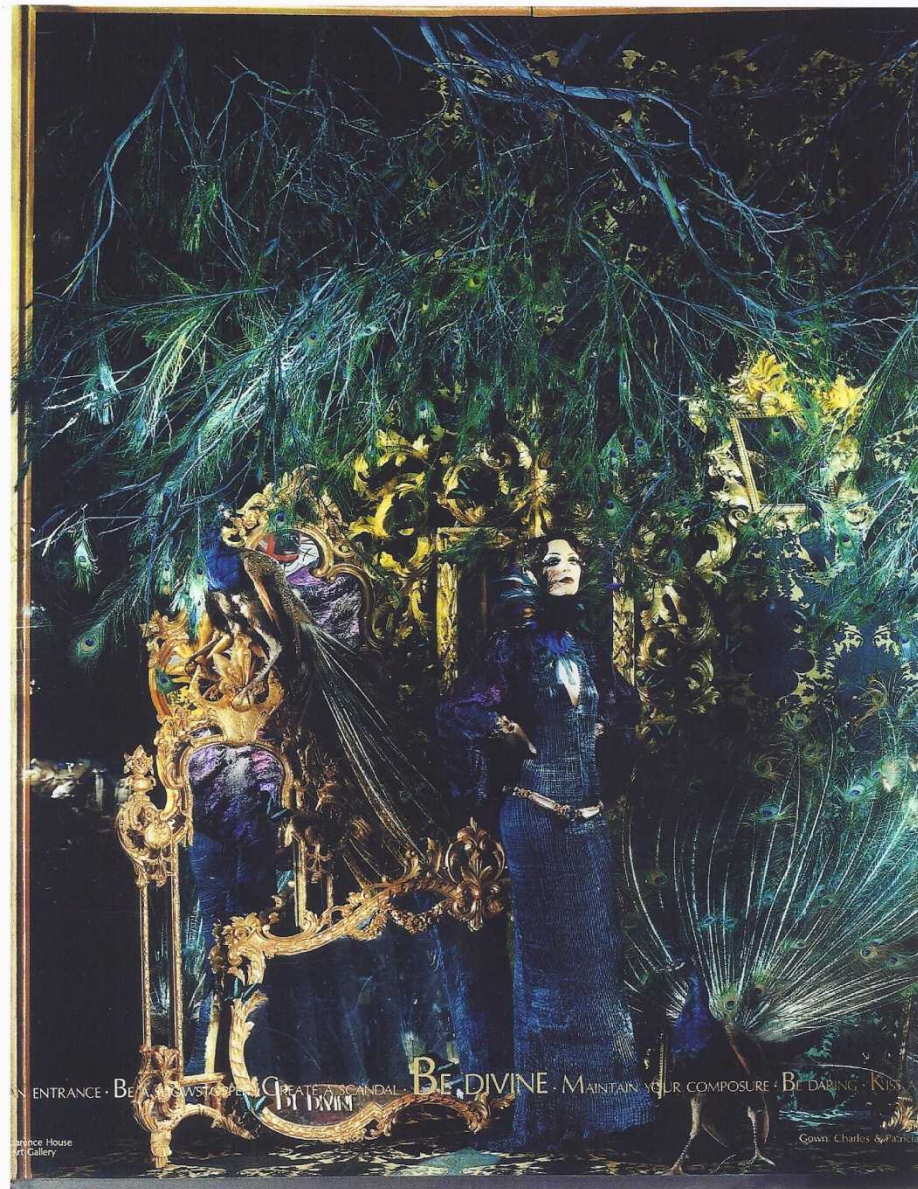
When the call came from Sandy Powell at 8.30 one morning to provide nine samples for *The Wings of the Dove* for the start of shooting at 4.30am the next day, "We dropped everything," says Charles. A number of Charles and Patricia's dresses were also hired for a video starring singer Toni Braxton, and the Lesters have been approached by Woody Allen's film company, with a view to providing costumes for his next film. Charles and Patricia have come a long way in 25 years. Full of enthusiasm and energy, they attribute their success to a passion for and total belief in what they do. As Patricia says: "It is having the courage to do something different" □



Window display in Liberty of London







BERGDORF GOODMAN CHRISTMAS WINDOWS DECEMBER 2002

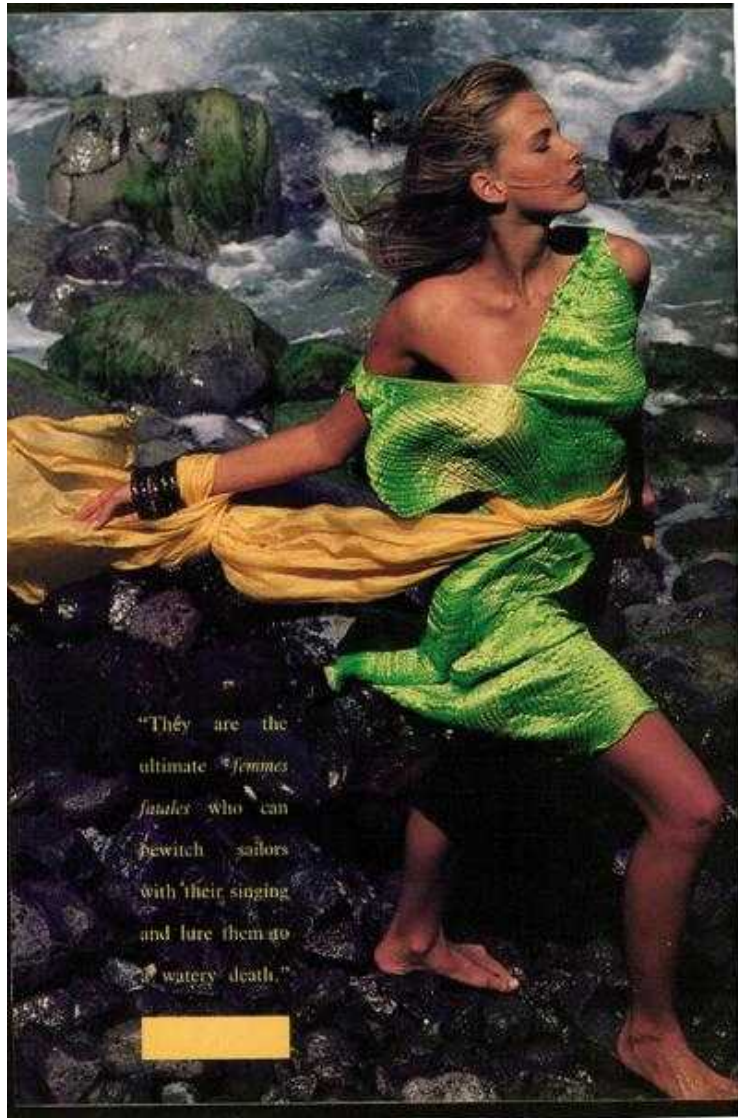


Various press images





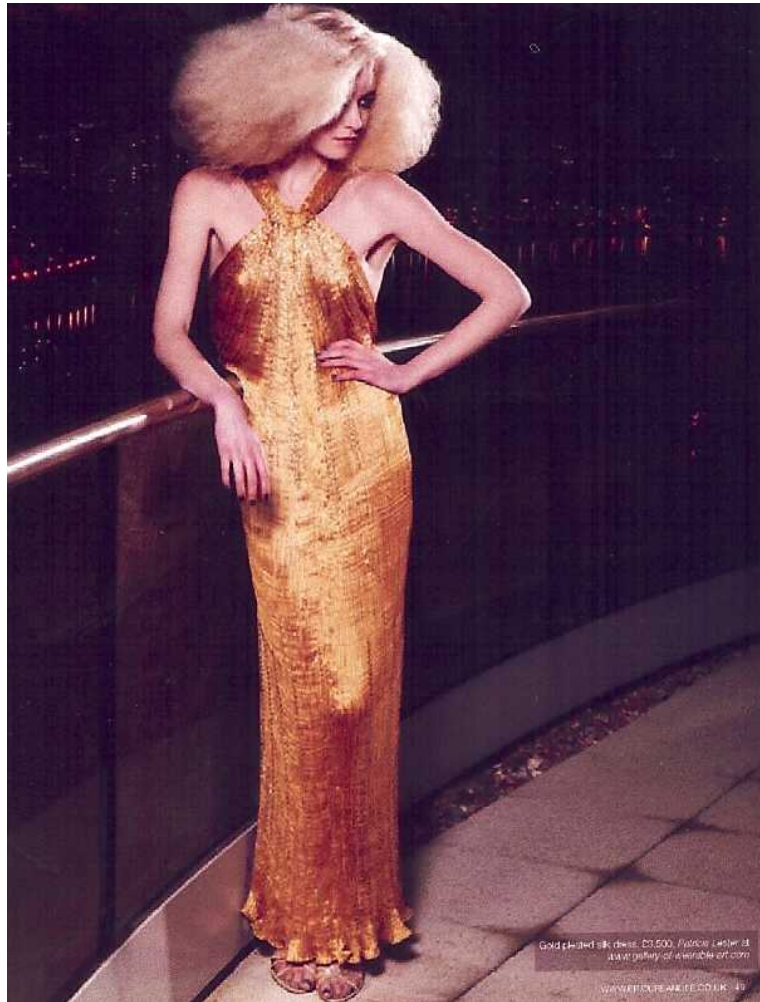
## Vogue and Cosmopolitan pictures







## Epicurean Life magazine





## Film



Albert Cohen  
Belle du Seigneur



Currently in production and featuring Natalia Vodianova shown above wearing her original Fortuny dress. Charles & Patricia Lester were asked to replicate this dress for Natalia to wear in the film.



V & A Museum fashion show





where the excitement was almost as intense as in Hollywood itself. Michael Caine and his wife Shakira had even hired a private room in the hotel, so they could watch the proceedings in peace.

Billy Crystal once again compered the evening in his own inimitable style, arriving pushed on a trolley, wearing the sinister mask and straitjacket of the character Anthony Hopkins has made his





Sheila Hancock



© Trevor Moore/Landmark Media

## Whoopi Goldberg at the Toni Awards





# Contact

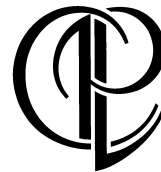
[www.charles-patricia-lester.co.uk](http://www.charles-patricia-lester.co.uk)

[www.interior-design-world.com](http://www.interior-design-world.com)

[www.designer-collection.co.uk](http://www.designer-collection.co.uk)

[www.film-world.com](http://www.film-world.com)

[www.world-of-opera.com](http://www.world-of-opera.com)



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