



In 1955, Restin Ballard, then a young Paris-based fashion editor for American *Vogue*, recalled attending a Madeline Aho Gals presentation at the couturier's cramped salon on Paris's Fashioning Saint-Hippolyte. Keeping her audience waiting as she pinned together her last dress package, Madeline Gals' show finally began with the appearance of her favorite model, "a beautiful Indo-Chinese girl who would weave into the room, draped straight in jersey."

Since couture's earliest days, Paris designers have been known to pepper their intimate presentations with a host of exotic beauties. Long before the advent of jet travel, such models imparted a certain polish to their creations, while abiding to a cosmopolitan world far beyond the walls of the couture salons. In the 1920s, exotic White Russians were much in demand for their neat-dress figures and aristocratic allure. While the 1950s saw the emergence of exotic mannequins such as Alla, a Eurasian beauty with striking chameleon hair, because a star attraction at Dior's shows, in addition to Bakewell and Gorenchy favorite China Madams, whose blended Portuguese and Chinese lineage was captured by Richard Avedon in the pages of *Harper's Bazaar*.

Relegated to the margins of fashion history until recently, the presence of these multi-ethnic models at the Paris couture houses points to the fashion world's early fascination with the culturally (and some might add racially) ambiguous, one that endures today, despite the continued debate surrounding the lack of diversity on fashion's catwalks and in style publications.

The evening before presenting his autumn/winter 2012 couture collection, lights blaze through the windows of Jean Paul Gaultier's headquarters at 325 Rue Saint-Martin in the Marais. Inside, moneyed clients and jaded editors alike must pass an inscription heralding the FUTURE OF THE PROLETAIRAT on their way up to Gaultier's couture salon, a reminder of the building's previous life as the home of the French Socialist party.

Upstairs, the couture workrooms buzz as the house's private main work-lane into the early morning to complete a number of half-finished gowns. In the middle of this busy workshop stands Gaultier, calmly conducting a final fitting on Eurasian model Hanan Ben Abdellah who is wearing the wedding gown that will close his show.

Pinching at fabric and adjusting the drape, the designer steps back to examine the dress on her, all the while carrying on multiple conversations with the heads of his ateliers, consulting sketches pinned on every

Dress: Atelier Versace  
Shoes: Christian Louboutin  
Cape: White gold, black  
sequin and baroque  
beaded silk tulle with  
iron threads and diamonds  
of 1.25 and 2.00 carats  
in hoop and set diamonds  
set in a 4.00 carat  
emerald and diamond  
earrings of Cartier



# The INTERVIEW

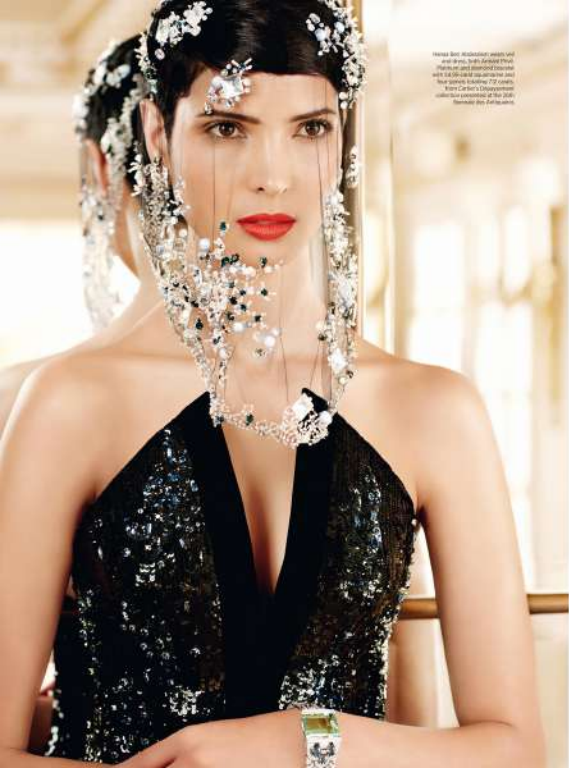
Dress: SPARKLE, Valentino; Necklace and earrings: 1921 with 173-carat cushion-shaped yellow sapphire and color-change alexandrite and diamond ring with 24 Ks. Lane; Cushion-shaped sapphire from Cartier; ring: Apple and rose, mounted with 100% Cartier



# The INTERVIEW

Top, skirt and shoes: Dior couture





Hanaa Ben Abdeslem: elegant and  
and so on, truly looking like  
Parisian and beautiful woman  
with a 14.000-odd sequins and  
her hair is shorter 12 weeks.  
From Carrol's (Chanel) costume  
collection presented at the 2011  
Parisian 2011 Parisian.

# LIFTING THE VEIL

*Styling by ELAINE LLOYD-JONES  
Photography by MICHELLE FERRARA*

*One day after walking in Chanel's spring/summer 2011 haute couture show in Paris, Tunisian model **Hanaa Ben Abdeslem** returned to her homeland to volunteer at a refugee camp during the Arab Spring. Alex Aubry meets the woman changing the face of Arabian beauty, while Bazaar photographs Hanaa in the season's most coveted couture*

# The INTERVIEW

Jacket, Jean Paul Gaultier; Jacket, Custom, Dior; Ring, Buccellati; Necklace and diamond necklace with sapphires, rubies, emeralds and sapphires, Cartier



Elms, Stephano Rolland; Ring and diamond necklace and matching earrings, Jack Carter



**J**ournalists often ask me if I wear a burqa when I'm back home. Little do they know that women in Tunis were one of the first in the region to discard the veil"

HANAA BEN ABDESLEM

# Bazaar

Harper's

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