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WINGS OF DESIGN

GABRIELLA CRESPI

A FASCINATING TALENT AND A DESIGNER OF UNIQUE TASTE, GABRIELLA CRESPI WAS MUCH MORE THAN AN INSPIRATION FOR MARC BOHAN, THE CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF THE HOUSE OF DIOR FROM 1961 TO 1989. SHE LEFT A LASTING MARK ON THE 1960s AND 1970s, AND TODAY, MORE THAN EVER, RECEIVES A SUBLIME TRIBUTE FROM MARIA GRAZIA CHIURI.
BY FRANÇOISE-MARIE SANTUCCI.

From her studies in art and, later, architecture at the Politecnico di Milano, Gabriella Crespi, who was born into a bourgeois Italian family in 1922, kept an enduring love for the pioneers of modernism, Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright. A taste for form. Beauty and vitality. A woman of rare charisma, Gabriella Crespi followed no school but her own from the outset.

Her works are the fruit of a singular fusion between luxury and baroque, classicism and sophisticated sensuality. Her small, handcrafted objects caught on among her circle of friends – including Hubert de Givenchy, Audrey Hepburn and Gunter Sachs – whom she frequented in Rome, where she settled in, worked and entertained in a sublime apartment nestled in the heart of a centuries-old palazzo.

In the early 1960s, Marc Bohan, the Creative Director of Dior, caught wind of her audacity and incorporated her work into his creative process. In the end, the flamboyant Milanese creative turned out to be a first-rate inspiration for him.

Renowned for spotlighting women artists (past and present) with every show, Maria Grazia Chiuri wished to celebrate this pioneer of bohemian-chic style in her latest Dior autumn-winter 2024-2025 ready-to-wear collection. For the Creative Director of women's collections, Gabriella Crespi perfectly embodies women who prevail in a world traditionally

dominated by men. Moreover, the magnificent Milanese icon was a major representative of that pivotal era – the late 1960s – when fashion was becoming more democratic and embarking on its transformation towards ready-to-wear. The recently introduced *Miss Dior* line – designed by Marc Bohan – had much to do with this; from that point on, fashion became a matter of dressing “all women”, in keeping with Christian Dior’s avant-garde ambition.

In the effervescent 1970s, Gabriella Crespi became a leader of a new manifesto in which fashion, music, design, art and desires for “elsewhere” were all enmeshed. Poised at the intersection of art and design, her objects were never intended for industrial production. Meanwhile, her personal creations, such as the *Kaleidoscope* lamp or the *Plurimi* coffee table, bore witness to an inventiveness that drew on all disciplines – a rare blend of classic codes, “exoticism” and ultra-modernity.

In the late 1980s, in keeping with her marvellous free spirit, Gabriella Crespi left everything behind and travelled to India. She spent nearly 20 years there before returning to Italy. She passed away in Milan in 2017, just a few years shy of 100 years old, forever faithful to one of her mantras: “*My inspiration is the universe.*”

