

# The Secret World of Haute Couture

## Peeling back the layers



This revealing film looks beyond the glamour and the gloss to uncover the anachronistic and surprising fairytale world of haute couture through its players past and present.

The world of haute couture is like a private club. Members are very rich, extremely discreet and their clothes are the most expensive in the entire world.

Filmmaker Margy Kinmonth takes a journey from Paris to New York and California to meet both designers and customers in this much talked about but little explained pocket of the fashion industry. Haute couture's traditional American customers are getting old and dying off now and fewer wealthy young women are taking their place to ensure its survival. She discovers how much has changed and surprisingly how much has stayed the same in this story of decadent decline.

Since its heyday after World War II the number of fashion houses showing haute couture in Paris has fallen from over a hundred to barely a dozen today. Margy goes behind the scenes at the haute couture giant Chanel as it prepares for the January shows and the launch of its spring/summer collection. She secures a rare interview with Karl Lagerfeld, gets a glimpse of the famous designer at work in his studio, and follows the complicated making and construction of one dress to fully understand what "hand made in Paris" really means.

Other interviewees include John Galliano – Dior's designer, veteran Italian designer Valentino, and French favourite Christian Lacroix. And Margy travels to New York to see American Ralph Rucci's collection. He is one of the few foreigners allowed to show haute couture in Paris.

Insider Baroness Helene de Ludinghausen, who was the directrice of Yves Saint Laurent for 31 years, spills the beans about the subject no one ever mentions – how much the frocks actually cost.

The film also follows key haute couture customers as they visit Paris to see the shows and shop for dresses that can cost up to \$100,000. Who are these women and why are they prepared to spend so much money on just one dress? There are strict unwritten rules for membership of this exclusive shopping club. What are they? And why is it all so hush hush?

Margy visits a number of big-spending 'members', including one of the oldest multi-millionaire collectors in New York City – Carol Petrie, whose wedding dress was made by Christian Dior himself in the late 1940s.

She also speaks to Becca Cason Thrash – wife of a Texan oil and gas tycoon, Susan Gutfreund – wife of the 80s bond dealer John Gutfreund, and Daphne Guinness – a Brit with a real passion for haute couture. These women regularly mingle on the front rows of catwalk shows alongside celebrities such as Victoria Beckham.

So is haute couture now an art form? These customers certainly think so.

#### Producer/Director

**Margy Kinmonth**

*The Strange World of Barry Who?*

#### Executive Producer

**Tracy Jeune**

*What Not to Wear*

## LEISURE, LIFESTYLE AND SOCIETY

**TX Date:** Autumn 2006

**Channel:** BBC FOUR

**Duration:** 1 x 60 minutes

M & E available

## FACTS & FIGURES

**As of spring 2006, there were only ten official haute couture houses remaining.**

**For all these fashion houses, custom clothing is no longer the main source of income, often costing much more than it earns through direct sales. Related luxury products such as shoes, perfumes, and licensing ventures make the real money.**

## AWARDS

**Margy Kinmonth picked up a Royal Television Society (RTS) Award in 2003 for her previous documentary *The Strange World of Barry Who?***