

BOOKS

THE SUNDAY JOURNAL

October 16, 201

REVIEW

The little rich girl who left a big impression

"Searching for Beauty — The Life of Millicent Rogers" by Cherie Burns

St. Martin's Press, \$27.99, 363 pp.

REVIEW BY ROBERT WOLTMAN

One wonders how our 21st-century, hyperkinetic media would cover Millicent Rogers if she were in her prime today.

Gorgeously svelte socialite, heiress to millions, trend-setting fashionista, much-married romantic adventuress, Rogers wore her legendary high life like a floor-length Blackglama.

Taos author Cherie Burns tells you all about it in her new biography, "Searching for Beauty."

Rogers was born in 1902 into wealth and privilege made possible by her grandfather, Henry Hurlleston Rogers, founding tycoon of Standard Oil. Her girlhood years were divided between the family's sumptuous New York City townhouse and their sprawling Long Island estate.



* Cherie Burns

discusses, signs "Searching for Beauty" at 2 p.m. Saturday at Alamosa Books, 8810 Holly NE.

photographer Cecil Beaton.

New York Times fashion reporter Christopher Petkanas relates Beaton's observation that Rogers, no poor little rich girl, wasn't particularly troubled, psychologically or otherwise, about having a colossal fortune she did

And she knew how to spend it — luxurious homes, months-long vacations at chic European locales (with her eight dachshunds and 35 suitcases in tow), ravishing clothing, dashing playboy suitors and liaisons with Clark Gable, Ian Fleming, Roald Dahl and Secretary of Defense James Forrestal. But more than being famous for being famous, Rogers possessed, in the words of designer John Galliano, a style both "fearless and fabulous." It was that unique trendsetting panache that got her regular layouts splashed across the pages of Harper's Bazaar and Vogue.

Late in her too-brief life, she discovered New Mexico. She hung out with Mabel Dodge Luhan's crowd of other unlikely expatriates; she bought, renovated and enlarged a crumbling Taos morada and took to wearing Native pawn jewelry, velvet Navajo blouses and the "squaw" or "broomstick" skirts that became another of her trademark statements. In one of the book's many photographs, Rogers, wearing such an ensemble, is pictured in her kitchen, perched on a stool above the stove as she dips fabric for another skirt into a steaming kettle of dye.

She looked for New Mexico's beauty beyond the sweep of the landscape and light, and found it in the Native American and Hispanic art she collected with a passion. The thousands of objects she amassed — pottery, textiles, tinwork, furniture, woodcarving and the silver and turquoise jewelry she so loved — became the genesis of the Taos museum that bears her name after her death in 1958.

The Rogers book is Burns' first biography and a noteworthy one. It's a well-researched and entertainingly readable portrait of a lesser-known yet fascinating character who became a part of New Mexico's cultural history.

Robert Woltnan is an Albuquerque writer and poet.