

THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLICENT



DURING MY HOLIDAY in Salzburg, I stayed up way too late to finish a couple of biographies of iconic women of inimitable style two centuries apart.

The first was **Cherie Burns's** on **Millicent Rogers**, *Searching for Beauty* (St. Martin's Press), which traces the life of the Standard Oil heiress from cradle to grave, where she was buried in an Apache-style dress designed by her friend **Elsa Schiaparelli**, cinched with a silver concho belt and draped in an Indian chief's blanket.

As the book's title aptly reflects, she believed in beauty, and her search for it manifested itself in fine houses, including a Virginia estate on the James River; paintings by **Degas**, **Renoir**, and **Fragonard**; and, of course, haute couture by the likes of Schiap and **Mainbocher**, which she mixed with folkloric and ethnic pieces and accessories—dirndls commissioned from tailors in Innsbruck; Native American silver and turquoise—to create her own unorthodox style. With Rogers, client-couture collaborations were a language



GIRLS IN THE HOOD
A LOOK FROM
YSL'S FALL
COLLECTION.
ABOVE LEFT:
MILLICENT
ROGERS,
PHOTOGRAPHED
BY HORST,
VOGUE, 1939.



SOCIAL SWIRLS
THE WRITER
COULD PICTURE
ROGERS WEARING
OSCAR DE LA
RENTA'S JACKET
AND DRESS.

of life, not just fashion. She found a soul mate in **Charles James**, whose first design for her was an organdy negligee trimmed with lace and biscuit-colored ribbons for a hospital stay. (Rogers suffered ill health her entire life.) Rogers wasn't just a couture muse in her lifetime. When she moved to Taos, New Mexico, she took up the Southwestern culture, not only adapting the native dress but advocating for American Indian causes. Upon her death at age 50 in 1953, her heirs left several thousand artifacts, furniture, pottery, and jewelry to the museum named for her in an adobe-like house in town. To the Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, she donated more than 200 Charles James pieces, now part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute.

The current season offers much in the way of Millicent Rogers drama: **Oscar de la Renta's** blue jacket and dress with embroidered dirndl skirt shown with a fur hood (Rogers loved hoods, and not only for skiing), **Stefano Pilati's** smart YSL black-and-white suit for a lunch date or a violet quartz evening column from Valentino—just the thing that Rogers might have worn at home for dinner, anchored in her own gold necklaces or her famous gold pearls.

Robert Massie's brilliant, extensively researched biography *Catherine the Great* (Random House) left me with an awesome impression of a German princess, married off at age sixteen, who became one of the most fascinating women of all time. Summoned to *andré* >224