



©PHOTO COURTESY OF FENDI

## ONCE UPON A TIME

FENDI CELEBRATES ITS STORYBOOK HISTORY WITH A YEAR OF FURS, FASHION, AND FOUNTAINS. BY CHRISTINA BOHNSTENGEL

July 2015 through July 2016 turned out to be quite a big year for the fashion house of Fendi. The Italian brand, whose name has been synonymous with luxury for more than nine decades, has a new home in Rome, and celebrated a pair of milestone anniversaries.

Kicking off the event trifecta was the iconic Karl Lagerfeld, celebrating 50 years with Fendi, the longest collaboration ever between a designer and a luxury label. Fendi fête the occasion with its first-ever haute couture show. Extravagance reigned Lagerfeld's runway on July 8, 2015, at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, with most of the line consisting of the world's finest furs. The Haute Fourrure collection wowed the well-heeled, presenting 30 fur looks, including a floor-length sable stunner with each follicle coated in pure silver for a shimmery effect that's plush to the touch.

By the time everyone recovered from the utter exquisiteness of it all, the October fall breezes had rolled into Rome, bringing with them a bold move. Rome's Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, a breathtaking architectural beauty, had been sitting empty since the 1930s. The "square colosseum" was originally envisioned and commissioned by Benito Mussolini, though never occupied due to WWII. Throughout seven decades, the windy, light-filled halls saw the occasional event renter, but never an owner who would dare to call it home. Enter Fendi chairman and CEO Pietro Beccari.

"When Pietro came to me with this idea, I said, 'You have got to be kidding me,'" Silvia Venturini Fendi told *Wallpaper* magazine. The creative director of accessories and menswear, granddaughter of the founding Fendi couple, and daughter and niece of the five famous Fendi sisters went on to explain, "[f]or us, it would be like having our offices inside the Trevi Fountain. That's how 'Roman monument' this palazzo is."



Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, Rome

After 18 months, Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana was fully restored and it united the Fendi global headquarters—for the first time—into one iconic space. From the basement archives to the seventh-floor fur atelier, a ground-floor exhibition space open to the public and rooftop terrace with sweeping views of Rome, it was a move that is still earning ink in the worlds of fashion, business, and architecture.

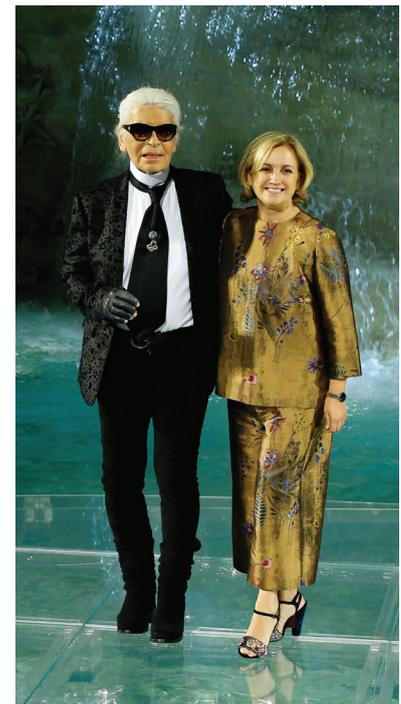
Fendi's grand finale of an eventful year left everyone breathless on July 7, 2016. As *Elle* magazine's Alex Frank explained, "Over-the-top would be a conservative description of what some attendees have proclaimed the most beautiful show ever."

To mark Fendi's epic 90th anniversary, Silvia Venturini Fendi and Karl Lagerfeld staged a couture show (its second ever) at Rome's Trevi Fountain (its first ever) to launch the Legends and Fairy Tales Collection. With models appearing to walk on the fountain waters, ornate dresses, capes, and furs, intricate embroidery, handmade appliqués, and a dreamy color palette, Fendi's fantastical dreamworld, inspired by the early 20th-century children's book illustrator Kay Nielson, came to life.

"To do this on a crystal bridge over the most famous fountain in the world? If that's not a fairy tale, I don't know what a fairy tale is," Lagerfeld told *Business of Fashion* before the show.

That crystal bridge was a plexiglass runway, set atop the fountain waters, and it set the scene for a magical night worthy of the company's multimillion-euro renovation of the Trevi Fountain itself. (In 2013, Fendi and the city of Rome embarked on an ambitious Fendi for Fountains project to revive Rome's landmark fountains.)

"To walk on water inside the Trevi Fountain?" Venturini Fendi marveled to *BOF*, "If somebody had told me that could happen, I would have said 'Impossible!'"



Karl Lagerfeld and Silvia Venturini Fendi at the 90th anniversary show at Rome's Trevi Fountain, 2016.



The Fendi sisters with creative director Karl Lagerfeld, 1986.

#### STORIED HISTORY, REVERED HERITAGE

Fendi's origin story is a matriarchal tale of legend and lore, Italian style, detailed in an anniversary coffee table book from Assouline called *Fendi Roma*. It started in Rome in 1925 when Edoardo Fendi and Adele Casagrande officially established the haute house of Fendi. By 1926, the couple expanded it to a small leather goods shop and fur works shop. Craftsmanship was key, and in 1933 they introduced a kind of leather with a natural yellow tint—it would become Fendi's unintended identity.

Between the 40s and 50s, the five Fendi sisters came on board. Paola, Franca, Carla, Alda, and Anna (Venturini Fendi's mother), influenced the direction of the brand in ways that became mythic. They brought a unique stylistic approach, farsighted vision, innovation, and enthusiasm. At a time when working women were a rarity, they started adding a feminine touch to the collections, like streamlining the fur silhouettes.

In 1965, Karl Lagerfeld, a German freelancer based in Paris at the time, brought his design eye to the team. He had not yet catapulted to icon status, but the sisters saw his skill and were crazy about him. The double-F logo was his creation, a symbol for "fun fur."

Fast forward to 1992 for the official arrival of Venturini Fendi, and then five years later for her big Fendi craze: in 1997, the fashion world fell in love with the now-famous It Bag, the Fendi Baguette. More would follow and in 2001, the luxury label conglomerate LVMH invested a major stake in Fendi fashion, immediately driving the company's future growth and international expansion.



Founders Adele and Edoardo Fendi, 1920s.



The remodeled structure fuses classical architecture with modern touches.

© ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF FENDI

© ABOVE: GIULIO NAPOLITANO/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM;

BELOW: COURTESY OF FENDI



Fendi's Policromia timepieces were inspired by the new headquarters.

Following a few of the steps in her mother's well-accessorized path—though decidedly independent—Delfina Delettrez Fendi, daughter of Venturini Fendi and a jewelry designer in her own right, now partners with the house from time to time. She worked on the jewelry collections for both Spring/Summer 2014, Fall/Winter 2014-15, and at Baselworld 2016, the world's biggest jewelry and watch fair, where Fendi Timepieces unveiled Policromia, the haute jewelry watch on which she collaborated.

Fendi Policromia timepieces—there are 20 in the collection—celebrate the roots and heritage of the Roman maison and recall the architecture of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana. Each one is elaborately adorned with precious elements, be it the brilliant cut white diamonds, malachite, lapis lazuli, green or blue mother-of-pearl or the genuine alligator straps, handmade in Fendi's Roman ateliers.

"The elements and materials used in the watches celebrate Rome and its eternal magnetism in a whispered way," imparted Delettrez Fendi. "Elegant ellipses create overlapping surfaces on the watch's dial, inspired by the architectural structure of the city of Rome with its unique streets."

The name Policromia originates from the Greek words *poly* (multiple) and *chrôma* (colors), embodying the idea of several colors together. Multiple shaded pieces, precious inserts, and asymmetrical bezels made in noble materials create the watch's daring silhouette, with a unique three-dimensional effect.

Today, there is a triumvirate at the helm of the luxury label, causing many to dub this as Fendi's new golden age. Lagerfeld, Venturini Fendi, and visionary chief executive Pietro Beccari are reinvigorating the house, and it's working.

The Spring/Summer 2017 collection picked up where Legends and Fairy Tales left off, in a decorative opulence twisted with an athletic élan. And so, for now, the happy ending seems all but guaranteed, with Fendi, Rome, and fans living fashionably ever after. ■