

**BAZAAR'S
NEW LIZ**

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**TAKES ON
VOGUE'S ANNA**

**BY
MICHAEL
GROSS**

THE

POSES

PAST THE TIGHT-LIPPED LIONS GUARDING THE FIFTH Avenue portals of the New York Public Library, the new nobility made its way up the grand staircase to *Vogue* magazine's one-hundredth-birthday party. Gone were the societies of blood, money, and merit. Here were the people for the nineties and the next millennium. Rich and poor, bald and dreadlocked, in tissue taffeta and frayed and studded leathers, the aristocracy of image arrived. There were models and movie stars. Designers and decorators. Trash and national treasures. Pop stars and paparazzi. Media moguls and "mention" junkies. Even some standard-issue society sorts. "I haven't seen a more glamorous party in my life," gasped gadabout R. Couri Hay.

Every important fashion designer was there: Jean-Paul Gaultier, Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren, Gian Franco Ferré, Christian Lacroix, Gianni Versace, Carolynne Roehm, Louis Dell'Olio, Isaac Mizrahi, and Marc Jacobs among them. They strolled past four twenty-foot-high torchères overflowing with flowers and two ranks of waiters crisply jacketed in white, and queued up patiently in a receiving line. There they found Anna Wintour, *Vogue's* angular editor, in an ivory beaded Geoffrey Beene; publisher Anne Sutherland Fuchs; and Harry Evans, the ruler of Random House (which has just brought out *On the Edge*, the lavish book of *Vogue* photographs in an exhibition that opened that night at the library). Also on line were Bernard Leser,



the president of *Vogue's* parent, Condé Nast Publications, and S. I. Newhouse, the proprietor of them all. It was a moment of triumph, proof of their publishing preeminence.

Karl Lagerfeld had flown in for the evening and was flying right out. "I just came for Anna Wintour," he said. "For a one-night stand."

It was a night of expensive thrills. But the biggest of all came when Elizabeth Tilberis arrived with publisher Randolph Hearst. A lifer at Condé Nast's British *Vogue*, Tilberis had most recently succeeded Wintour as its editor. Wintour went on to *HG* and then to American *Vogue*—Condé Nast's cornerstone property. Now Tilberis was sending a frisson through the world of glossy magazines by making a jump to *Vogue's* historic bitter rival, *Harper's Bazaar*, published by the Hearst Corporation.

At first glance, Wintour is a tightly coiled wire plugged into chic, Tilberis a sweet, silver-haired mum. But the two are actually quite alike. Like her ex-boss, Tilberis is in her early forties. She is British, as is Wintour's father (Wintour's mother is American). They share so-called international style, profess love for American designers but wear lots of Chanel, and are steeped in Condé Nast's vision of fashion as a hub around which the best talent, the best sort of people, the best of everything, revolves. They also share a core of steel. Wintour once brashly wore a yellow-sequined Chanel scuba jacket to a Giorgio Armani dinner party (inconveniently scheduled on a Halloween night smack in the middle of New York's grueling fashion week). Last fall, Tilberis punched a guard who'd menaced one of her editors at a Gaultier fashion show.

In a century of skirmishes between the powerful publishing empires that own the competing magazines, Hearst's hiring of Tilberis is the latest shot across Condé Nast's bow. For a quarter-century, Condé Nast has led fashion's armada, and Hearst has seemed rudderless. Indeed, in the past decade, *Bazaar* has seemed to be drowning. Hearst hopes that Tilberis will be the company's Wintour—and more. She's the latest player in Hearst's uncertain quest to restore itself to glossy glory. Tilberis says she's been promised virtual *carte blanche*. If she succeeds, she may spark a renaissance for fashion magazines and the entire fashionable world. "It's so unlike Hearst," admits Carl Portale, *Bazaar's* publisher. "But this is a big effort. I think we're going to give them a run for the money."

The duel between Tilberis and Wintour is being taken as seriously as other great dustups in recent corporate culture, like Herb Siegel of Chris-Craft versus Steve Ross of Warner, or record moguls David Geffen and Walter Yetnikoff. Each editor claims she wants nothing but the best for the other, yet feathers have already been ruffled—and Tilberis doesn't even officially start work until Thursday.

ON THE NIGHT OF *Vogue's* BIRTHDAY PARTY, people were watching for the slightest sign of tension between Tilberis and Wintour. Unfortunately, both were on their best behavior. So when the photographers surged close as Tilberis reached the head of the reception line, all they saw were bright, if slightly forced, smiles, stiff kisses, and even a few warm hugs.

Still, all the hubbub made it clear it wasn't only Wintour's night. In fact, for some, the evening had begun earlier at Mortimer's, where cosmetics grandees Leonard and Evelyn Lauder gave a cocktail party for Tilberis. Condé Nast's Leser, whom Tilberis calls her godfather, showed up there on the way to a black-tie dinner he and Anne Fuchs were giving.

A portent appeared amid all the careful civility. Affixed to the door of Mortimer's was a *Bazaar* cover that Lauder had had printed up with Tilberis's picture. But just across Lexington, in the window of a Gap store, was a far larger, blown-up cover of *Vogue's* hundredth-anniversary issue. It served as a reminder of how small Hearst had let *Bazaar* become. From January to April of 1992, *Bazaar* ran 305 ad pages, a decrease of more than 19

percent from 1991. *Vogue* ran 905 pages of ads in the same period, slightly up from 883 pages in 1991. Through April, in a four-magazine field, *Vogue* had 46 percent of all the ad pages, followed by *Elle* with 24.9 percent, *Bazaar* with 15.5 percent, and *Mirabella* with 13.5 percent. These figures were blunt indications that *Bazaar's* most recent editor, Anthony Mazzola, a 45-year veteran at cronyish Hearst, had far outstayed his welcome in the fickle fashion world.

Hearst executives shy away from the press when the subject comes to *Harper's Bazaar*. D. Claeys Bahrenburg, president of Hearst Magazines, did not respond to repeated requests for interviews. Many others wouldn't speak for attribution. Some of these are the lame-duck employees of *Harper's Bazaar*, ten of whom—including all of the magazine's senior staff members—were dismissed at fifteen-minute intervals by Bahrenburg's assistant and a human-resources executive on March 18 in what *Media Industry Newsletter* called a "bloodbath."

At least one of the dismissals has already had repercussions beyond the magazine world. Carlotta Jacobson, *Bazaar's* beauty editor for nearly two decades, has close relationships with Leonard Lauder of Estée Lauder, Guy Peyrelongue of L'Oréal, and executives at Revlon, Calvin Klein, and Neutrogena. According to a source close to Jacobson, they all called Carl Portale before the dismissals and received assurances that she would remain at *Bazaar*. The advertisers called again to express their dismay after March 18. Jacobson got a call, too—from Condé Nast.

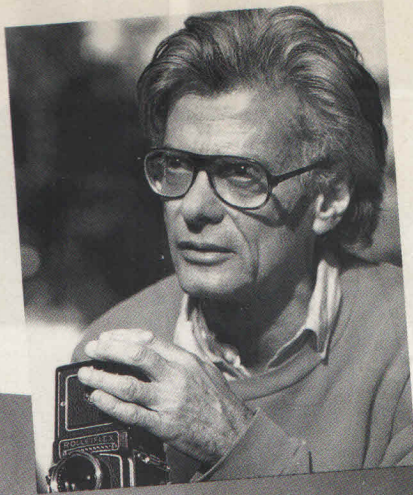
Originally, after Tilberis's hiring was announced, "we were all very excited," says one of those who were soon to be gone. "We'd been waiting for this for years." Bahrenburg called a meeting and assured the staff that "Liz will certainly not do what Anna Wintour did at *Vogue*—come in with a broom and sweep everyone out." By early March, though, the staff was restive. No one had said a word about one of their biggest perks—travel to Europe for fashion shows that were beginning that month. Mazzola demanded an appointment with Bahrenburg and Tilberis and learned his people wouldn't be making the trip.

THE NEXT MORNING, TILBERIS AND BAHRENBURG met the staff in a grim, windowless conference room. "Claeys's voice was shaking," says the staffer. He paid tribute to Mazzola, "which was a joke." Then Tilberis spoke for a moment, said she had not been interviewing for a new staff—"contrary to popular belief"—and added, "I look forward to seeing you all in April," when she would return from the shows. About two weeks later, while Tilberis was in Europe, the phone calls came from human resources.

Several of these employees (who were given seven weeks' notice, nonnegotiable severance agreements, and an offer of help in finding new work within Hearst—or outside, if necessary) are now considering age-discrimination lawsuits. They are almost all over 40. A Hearst newsletter bragged about *Bazaar's* "new, younger, vital" editors. "It happens that the law says you can't hire or fire based on age," says Jeffrey Bernbach, a lawyer representing some of the dismissed staffers. Tilberis says they had to go so she could have a clean break with the past.

Also silent are most of the *Vogue* editors here and abroad who have been approached by Tilberis and her first hire, creative director Fabien Baron (a controversial graphic designer who has worked for Italian *Vogue*, *New York Woman*, and *Interview*; has done ads for Barneys New York, Valentino, and Michael Kors, among others; and is now designing Madonna's erotic photo book). Wintour hints at how she's kept some of her editors. "I think they should be paid very big salaries," she says. "Business is business."

Tilberis has also contacted two prominent Condé Nast photographers, Steven Meisel and Patrick Demarchelier. But they have reportedly been told that if they shoot for *Bazaar*, they will never work for another Condé Nast magazine anywhere in the world. "We won't share photographers," Si Newhouse says



**FASHION LEGENDS
RICHARD AVEDON,
CARMEL SNOW,
GRACE MIRABELLA,
AND DIANA
VREELAND
(CLOCKWISE FROM
TOP LEFT).**

bluntly. Wintour makes clear her desire to keep her stars. "I don't blame Liz for wanting them," she says. "I wish she didn't." For now, Demarchelier is staying at *Vogue*, she continues. But as for Meisel, says James Moffat, the photographer's agent, "everything at this stage is up in the air in terms of everything."

Meisel has had problems off and on with both *Vogue* and *Allure* over creative control at his shoots. He continues to work for Italian *Vogue*, although Franca Sozzani, Italian *Vogue*'s editor and Baron's former boss, doesn't sound secure when asked about her star photographer. "I find Steven Meisel myself," she says. "Not Liz. Not Fabien. Twelve years we work together. I supported him when he wasn't Steven Meisel. The respect we have is beyond money. He can do what he wants." Sozzani thinks *Bazaar* should discover its own photographers.

Tilberis and Baron, 32, would not be specific about their plans. What's known is that Tilberis has hired Baron's wife, Scia Scia (pronounced "Sha-Sha") Gambaccini, as senior fashion editor; Ellen Fair, who's moving over from Hearst's *Esquire*, as managing editor; *Mirabella*'s Joel Berg as art director; freelance writer Katherine Bishop as features editor; Tina Gaudoin, from England's *Harpers & Queen* (another Hearst magazine), as beauty editor; Sarah Foley, a model manager, as model booker; and Eryan Metzner, from *Vanity Fair*, as a fashion editor. What of a fashion director? There's been only one sign: Tilberis has asked to be seated at several fashion shows near Tonne Goodman, a top stylist who just left Calvin Klein.

Hearst executives have told people outside the company that they are reviving the in-your-face *Bazaar* of its glory days, when Carmel Snow was its editor, Alexey Brodovitch its art director, Diana Vreeland its fashion editor, and Richard Avedon its prin-

cipal photographer. Skeptics say Hearst doesn't have the style or the backbone to fight *Vogue*. Tilberis disagrees with them all. But she won't describe her magazine. "Wait and see. The book will look different from anything else on today's market. I don't think you think about a magazine's history. You try to create the magazine's future."

She probably hasn't had time to create much just yet. She's been busy moving, acquiring an East Side house and getting her two sons settled in school. Meanwhile, she's working out of space at *Esquire* while Anthony Mazzola, *Bazaar*'s editor for the past twenty years, finishes off the June issue a few blocks away. They cross paths sometimes, and a friend says Mazzola dreads the prospect of an encounter.

Tilberis won't reveal her redesign until September, so *Bazaar*'s July and August issues are orphans. Tilberis calls these "caretaker" issues and says she will fill them with "inventory." But a source at *Bazaar* says, "There is no inventory. It's all being done by Liz."

In the meantime, the fashion world waits and watches and gossips endlessly and unmercifully. There was an undercurrent at the *Vogue* party that was more exciting than all the décolletage on display. Near midnight, both Tilberis and Wintour gravitated to one table. They joined Karl Lagerfeld, a favorite of both. Filling out the group were Wintour's husband, psychiatrist David Shaffer; Susan Gutfreund; Lagerfeld's assistants Gilles du Four and Victoire de Castellane; Carlyne Cerf de Dudzele, one of the *Vogue* editors Tilberis recently tried, but failed, to hire; *Vogue* creative director André Leon Talley; Paloma Picasso and husband Rafael Lopez-Cambil; and the writer Javier Arroyuelo. Randolph Hearst was long gone.

"Here is the backstage," Lopez-Cambil whispered. "The intrigues, the protagonists, are all here."

"It's a fashion war fought with pencils and scissors," said Arroyuelo. "But *verry* civilized. After all, we all cling to the fantasy."

THE WHOLE STORY SHOULD START WAY BACK," says Alexander Liberman, the editorial director of Condé Nast. *Harper's Bazar*—the second *a* was added in 1929—was born 125 years ago and eventually sold to Hearst. *Vogue* was founded by a group of swells and sold to Condé Nast, an ambitious young man from Peoria. He bought it in 1909 but lost control to bankers and British press lords following the Crash of 1929. They sold *Vogue* to the Newhouse family in 1959.

Warfare began as soon as Hearst bought *Bazaar* in 1913 and retooled it as an elite fashion magazine. From then on, *Vogue* and *Bazaar* were constantly stealing each other's employees. But Carmel Snow's defection in 1932 from *Vogue* to *Bazaar*

was a major blow to Nast. "The crown princess had abandoned him," says Liberman. "Everything was based on her."

Two years later, Snow hired émigré art director Alexey Brodovitch. Together, they created "a remarkable magazine," Liberman says. "It had more style and class than *Vogue*. In many ways, I had to follow." *Vogue* fought back, banning the work of the traitors, poaching illustrator Bébé Bérard and editors like Nicolas de Gunzburg and Babs Simpson, but it wasn't enough.

Snow's *Bazaar*, with its stunning, disturbing Brodovitch layouts and photographs by Martin Munkasci, Louise Dahl-Wolfe, and, after World War II, Richard Avedon, set a new standard and redefined the genre. Though it never beat *Vogue*'s advertising revenues and had a higher circulation for only a few years, *Harper's Bazaar* was the clear creative leader.

In 1937, Diana Vreeland, an eccentric young woman of enormous style, joined Snow's team. She wrote a famous column, "Why Don't You . . ." in which she dispensed advice like "Have a furry elk-lined trunk for the back of your car."

For Richard Avedon, raised on fashion magazines in a retailer's household, *Bazaar* was a dream come true. Brodovitch started him working for "Junior Bazaar," an influential new section. "*Bazaar* was my home when I left home," says Avedon.

"What was it like?" says D. D. Ryan, a Vreeland assistant who became a fashion editor in 1949. "Pure Hearstian. Frugal. Everybody did eight jobs for the price of one. But creatively, it was tops. There was real appreciation of the magazine as a visual, a literary . . . God! We had Cartier-Bresson. Brassai. Capa. Truman Capote! And you could introduce an idea, a writer, a photographer. They'd pay attention. It was so alive."

Polly Mellen was a maverick from Philadelphia's Main Line who sometimes wore her sweaters backward and had worked at Lord & Taylor, Saks, and *Mademoiselle*. She met Snow and Vreeland in 1951. "*Vogue* was just a fashion magazine," she says. "*The Bazaar* was more creative. It was daring, original, far-out, an extraordinary group of people." Vreeland fascinated her. "She was totally imaginative, totally futuristic, totally *in toto*."

But Vreeland wasn't long for *Bazaar*. Brodovitch resigned in 1958, and that same year, Hearst passed Snow's job to her niece, a former *Good Housekeeping* fashion editor named Nancy White. Like Jessica Daves, then the editor of *Vogue*, White lacked daring. "There was no aristocracy of thought there," says Avedon. "There was no way Diana would be Nancy White's fashion editor, and she left." Flush with new Newhouse money, Condé Nast snapped Vreeland up in 1962 and made her editor of *Vogue* the next year.

In 1965, Avedon was renegotiating his *Bazaar* contract. "I felt they should treat me well, and they were very rough about it," he says. Still, he shook hands on a new ten-year "agreement."

"Your contract should be ending," Vreeland said when she called Avedon that night. When he said he'd made a deal that day, she countered, "Will you at least hear what we have to say?" Avedon met with Liberman, and within days he signed with Condé Nast. "Then I vomited for about two weeks without stopping," he says. "I learned everything at *Bazaar*, and now I was going to 'the enemy camp.'"

VREELAND WAS THE LAST OF THE GREAT fashion dictators. "Boy, was I in the greatest seat at the greatest hour of the greatest time," she once said. "The year of the jet, the Pill. A completely different social world was being created." Under her, *Vogue* "took first place," Liberman says.

Eventually, Hearst fought back. In July 1971, the company hired James Brady, the publisher of *Women's Wear Daily*, and installed him as publisher and editorial director. Brady dubbed his *Bazaar* "the thinking woman's fashion magazine." He put a Richard Nixon look-alike in a fashion layout and ran a photo of Faye Dunaway with unshaven armpits. "He was a daily journalist," says an ex-Hearst editor. "He was not visually astute."

"The magazine had leprosy," adds an editor of that time. "No one wanted to come near it. It was too weird. The turmoil in the country was present in all the pages." Hearst's powers were appalled. Sixteen months after he had started, Brady was fired by letter. It said that a new team—headed by Mazzola—would be taking over and that Brady should clean out his desk before they arrived. "I came to solve a problem," Mazzola once told me. "It was not an orderly transition."

With grim satisfaction, Brady notes, "Nineteen years later, it still hasn't turned around."

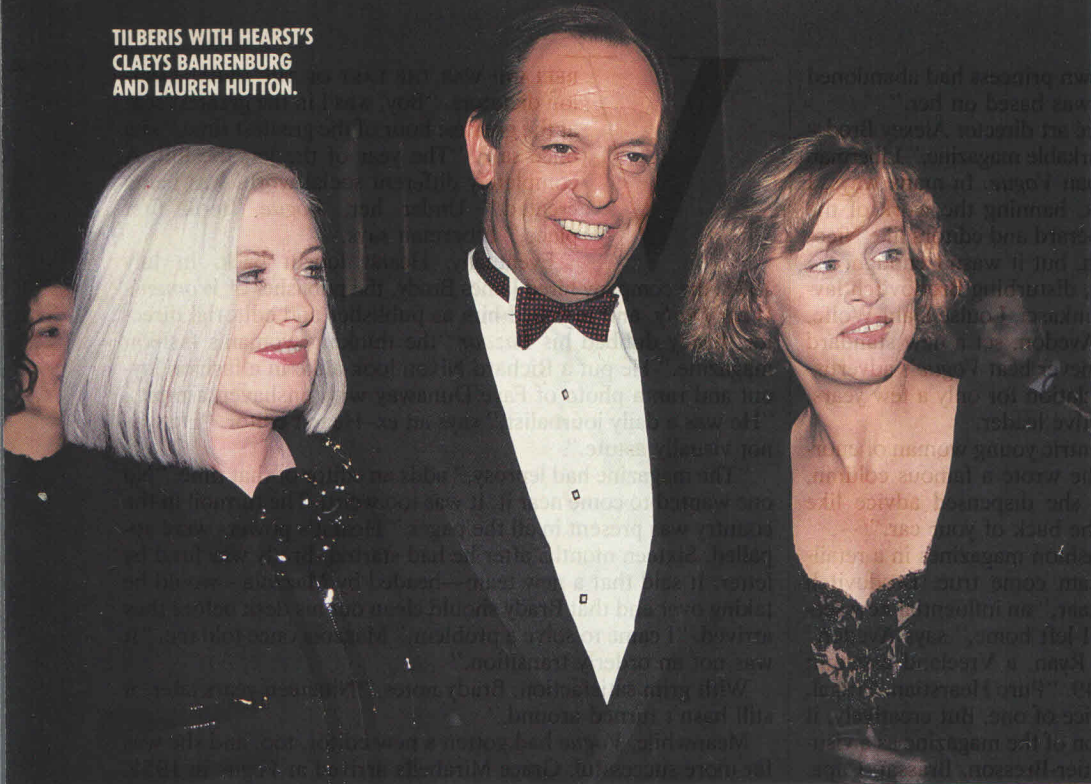
Meanwhile, *Vogue* had gotten a new editor, too, and she was far more successful. Grace Mirabella arrived at *Vogue* in 1951, eventually becoming Vreeland's associate.

By 1971, Condé Nast had noticed that there had been "a profound change in society," Liberman says. The extravagance and authoritarian single-mindedness that Vreeland had championed were out of fashion. "She was going too far," says an editor who worked under her. She was "too flamboyant, too over-the-top," the editor says. "It was time to move on, and she didn't want to make the change."

Liberman and Newhouse saw the change coming and decided Vreeland had to go. "Change happens," says Newhouse. "It's



TILBERIS WITH HEARST'S
CLAEYS BAHRENBURG
AND LAUREN HUTTON.



pages. Though he signed a new contract to do covers, he says, "It was time to concentrate on orders from within instead of another phone call from *Vogue*."

ANNA WINTOUR'S career in fashion began in her hometown of London in 1970, when she went to work for Hearst's British *Harper's Bazaar* (now called *Harpers & Queen*). Moving to New York in 1976, she joined Mazzola's *Bazaar*.

"Tony felt the sittings I was doing weren't right for the American market," Wintour says. Fired, she went on to *Viva* and then *New York*, where she quickly made a mark with influential fashion and design pages. She spurned Condé Nast's early overtures. But she did meet with Mirabella. "Grace asked what job she wanted," says an editor who heard of their encounter. "Grace, of course I want your job," Wintour replied. She returned to *New York*.

Finally, in 1983, Liberman lured her to *Vogue* with the new—and purposefully vague—title "creative director" and a mandate to use her elbows. Liberman says he felt "an absolute certitude I needed this presence." Adds Newhouse, "Alex's mind is quite subtle and complex. I won't dare to say what was in his mind. Everything I heard was 'Here is a great talent.'"

Liberman didn't feel he was planting a thorn in Mirabella's side. "Perhaps I was silly," he says. "In my innocence, I thought she could collaborate with Grace and enrich the magazine." But both Wintour and Mirabella felt frustrated. "Things worked differently then," Wintour says. "Grace picked the clothes. There was one point of view. It's not how we do it now."

"I'm the first to see nothing coming," says Mirabella. "Even a bus."

According to one *Vogue* source, Wintour did wonderful work—but some of it ended up on the cutting-room floor. "Anna was the best sport. She came in looking adorable, bringing in new ideas. She'd get put down, take it, and—bless her heart—come in the next day with another idea. Then she realized she just couldn't take it."

Beatrix Miller, the longtime editor of British *Vogue*, chose that moment to retire. Bernie Leser, the managing director of Condé Nast's English operation, offered Wintour the job. Recently married and newly pregnant, she at first turned it down. After months of deliberation, she agreed.

Reaction in England was swift and severe. Many top fashion editors felt they were better suited for the job than Wintour. Under Miller, British *Vogue* had been a whimsical, eccentric magazine, much admired by the cutting-edge fashion crowd. "It was a rare animal," says Liz Tilberis, who started there after placing second in a 1969 *Vogue* talent contest.

During Wintour's first months, unhappiness spilled into the pages of the press. For a supposedly civil people, the British gave Wintour an extraordinarily hard time. They nicknamed her Nuclear Wintour and the Wintour of Our Discontent (the *Evening Standard* mentioned "her habit of crashing through editor-

Somehow Tony Mazzola survived the spectacle of various would-be *Bazaar* chiefs passing through Bahrenburg's office.

always traumatic. It may appear abrupt to people outside, but it was not a sudden decision." Mirabella had seen Liberman grow irritated with Vreeland. "She wasn't interested in deadlines," says Mirabella. "And women weren't buying fashion magazines. Circulation was plummeting. *Vogue* had nothing to do with anything going on in the world—zero. I was the one who always worked with Alex. I was the one who was around. I guess he got the feeling of how I sounded."

Called back from a sitting in California, Mirabella was handed the daunting task of updating *Vogue* for an era of women's liberation.

Shortly after Vreeland left, society editor Margaret Case was let go. Her desk was simply removed from her office, and she committed suicide. "They were not very good at letting people go," Vreeland wrote in her memoir, *DV*. "She threw herself out a window because she was eighty, she was out of work, she had no money—and she'd been dismissed in the most terrible way." To the outside world, Condé Nast had become Condé Nasty.

Polly Mellen sums up the change: "I went home one day, and the next, Diana's red office, the leopard rug, her Rigaud candles, her scent, her being, were gone. The walls were beige."

Mirabella and Liberman retooled the magazine quickly for the new, natural-look working woman. "My *Vogue* was more accessible," Mirabella says. "I have a conviction: Women aren't inanimate objects you hang clothes on." Under Mirabella, circulation rose from 400,000 in 1971 to 1,245,000 in 1987.

Richard Avedon stayed on, but he felt something was missing. "The period Diana was there was the last time I could express myself honestly in fashion photography," he says. Everything had changed. The exotic models were gone, replaced by wholesome Lauren Hutton and Patti Hansen. "It went from complicated and intelligent beauty to the girl next door who'd moved away," Avedon says. "It was the beginning of fashion at its lowest common denominator, the pandering to mass appeal that ends with Madonna on the cover of *Vogue*."

By the late seventies, Avedon had stopped doing fashion

ships as though they were brick walls, leaving behind a ragged hole and a whiff of Chanel"). Tom Binns, a jewelry designer, created a pin that read VAGUE VOGUE VOMIT.

What had Wintour done to deserve this? She'd installed her own desk (as she had at every job since *New York*), expected staffers to arrive early, and made it clear that those who couldn't comply wouldn't be happy. More significantly, she changed British *Vogue*, substituting rational uniformity for idiosyncrasy, the straightforwardly sexy for the strangely erotic.

"There was certainly an eccentric side to London I thought was great," Wintour says, "but women also wanted reality. Maybe I put too much stress on it at the time, but I was new and I wanted to put my stamp on it. I got it from Grace Mirabella, that sense of realism. I certainly brought that to London."

"She showed a fine instinct for Thatcher's Britain and hard-edged consumerism, but Anna was seen as an American agent," says a well-placed observer of British fashion. That community would have preferred it if Grace Coddington, an ex-model and Miller's fashion director, had been given Wintour's job. "Grace was very much the queen of fashion in London," says Wintour, "and here I come with a lot of attention on me. Obviously, it was difficult for her."

Though she had actually come to admire Wintour, the rumors continued when Coddington left the magazine and England to take a job working for Calvin Klein in New York. Three months later, in April 1987, "there was incredible speculation" that Wintour's chilly reception in London was about to send her scurrying back to America, the observer says. Pregnant again, and often alone in her long-distance marriage to David Shaffer, who was based in New York, she was rumored to be in discussions with another magazine.

This was roundly denied at the time, but today, Wintour allows there was some truth in the rumors. She received offers, she admits, but discussions "didn't go very far. I was having a hard time personally. It wasn't a secret."

Newhouse flew to London to see her—and keep her. "We were having problems with *House & Garden* at the time," he says. "So I suggested she come back and take it over." Newhouse must have known of her ambition to edit *Vogue*, but he wasn't dangling any promises. "You don't deal with magazines in such a flip way," he says. "There's too much at stake. You don't park somebody. That's the worst kind of publishing management—and no way to treat a lady."

That summer, new rumors flew that Wintour was heading back to New York. The news soon leaked. But *House & Garden's* editor, Louis Gropp, was on vacation and couldn't be reached. When *Women's Wear Daily* printed the rumor on August 12, Condé Nast staffers said at the time, the newspaper never reached their desks that morning. Two days later, with Gropp finally located, Wintour's new job was announced.

Gropp ended up quite

happy at Hearst's *House Beautiful*. The moment also proved fortuitous for Tilberis, who'd succeeded her best friend, Coddington, as fashion director at British *Vogue*. That summer, though she'd enjoyed working for Wintour, she'd accepted a job offer. Ralph Lauren was reportedly set to pay her \$250,000 a year to join his design team. By making Wintour happy, Condé Nast was able to keep Tilberis. Ten days after she resigned, Tilberis did a quick about-face and took over British *Vogue*.

Tilberis quickly settled into her job, striking a balance between the magazine she'd grown up with and the one it had become. Her *Vogue* was a quick success. Wintour remained enmeshed in controversy. Her eight-month attempt to remake *House & Garden* (renamed *HG*) into a cross-disciplinary journal of style quickly ran into trouble. Readers and decorators revolted. Things got so bad, it was widely believed that in a secret room in a Condé Nast building, operators were fielding an avalanche of subscription cancellations.

HG had its admirers. "I wouldn't part with my eight issues for thousands of dollars," says Polly Mellen. "It was so brilliant. But the Old Guard couldn't take it."

"It was a horrible time," Wintour says. "I thought I was doing an interesting magazine." Meanwhile, events outside Condé Nast were conspiring to take *HG* away from her.

IT WAS THE YEAR OF *Elle*. THE SLICK, GORGEOUSLY PRINTED American edition of the French magazine was growing fast. For so long, there had been no competition. *Bazaar* was in a holding pattern. Anthony Mazon's editing approach had become increasingly formulaic, dependent on celebrities and monthly themes repeated year after year—like "The World's 10 Most Beautiful Women." "We called it the '10 Most Available,'" snickers an editor of that time.

In 1987, *Vogue's* advertising revenues hit \$79.5 million and *Bazaar* booked just \$32.5 million. *Elle*, at \$39 million, was coming on fast. At 850,000 copies a month, it was also outselling *Bazaar*. Hearst seemed not to notice, but Condé Nast did. "There was a slight tremor," Liberman allows. "People looked at *Elle* carefully. There was a young, irreverent attitude that seemed to appeal. It's quite possible we learned certain lessons."

No one ever thought "to make *Vogue* like *Elle*," Newhouse insists. But "the fact that it was as successful as it was was a sign there was a problem with our own magazine that we should be looking at. It seemed a change at the top was necessary."

As far back as 1986, Liberman had let Grace Mirabella know that something was amiss. But he did it with "words I didn't quite understand," she says. "The more I sounded one way, the more they sounded the other. For the first time in my life, I was really unhappy."

Newhouse admits that Mirabella's departure was badly handled. "Alex and I made the decision to change," he



ALEXANDER LIBERMAN.



SI NEWHOUSE.

Newhouse admits Mirabella's departure was badly handled: "The P.R. of it got all bitched up."

says, and somehow it leaked to Liz Smith, who promptly broadcast the news. Mirabella found out she'd been fired after a friend heard it on TV. "The way it was handled was graceless—without making a pun," Newhouse continues. "The P.R. of it got all bitched up. So fine. But it wasn't a spur-of-the-moment decision."

Still, Anna Wintour was surprised that "they wanted to make a change so soon," she says. "It was so hard for Alex and Si to do it. Unlike what's been written, they are incredibly loyal people, and Grace had done a brilliant magazine for so long."

Some of Mirabella's editors cried when she told them what had happened, but "she never batted an eye," says Polly Mellen. "Grace was brave beyond anything I ever saw." Within days, Rupert Murdoch got in touch with her. A few months later, he made her an offer she couldn't refuse—a magazine bearing her name; it first appeared in June 1989. Initially, at least, *Vogue* considered *Mirabella* enough of a threat to warn photographers and models that they couldn't appear in both.

"You must remember," says Liberman, "*Mirabella* took a very strong *Vogue* [contingent]. Whatever we could keep as exclusive we were going to keep. All publications want originality and exclusivity. A choice has to be made."

THE ATTENTION OF THE FASHION WORLD SOON turned again to *Harper's Bazaar*. What was Hearst going to do? Through the early eighties, the magazine had registered consistent gains, nearly doubling ad pages between 1979 and 1984. But in 1985, ad pages started falling, and revenue was flat. By 1988, ad pages had fallen almost 11 percent.

Mazzola had been at Hearst for 40 years, rising from assistant art director at *Town & Country* to its top job before taking over *Bazaar* in 1972. Over the years, he'd lost a number of top talents in his fashion department. "Tony never claimed to be a fashion person, but he never relinquished that much power," one ex-editor explains. His problems began in the mid-eighties, when his wife, Michele, who favored aggressively ordinary clothes and aviator glasses, joined the magazine's staff.

"She was always butting in," says the editor. "Selecting clothes, going through slides. We closed doors and made jokes. Fashion was totally dictated by them, and they had no taste."

Another relative soon entered the arena. In July 1987, Randolph Hearst married Veronica Uribe, a figure of some intrigue in the international social set (*New York*, November 18, 1991), and she quickly took a keen interest in her new family's glossies. Late in 1988, Mazzola hired a top stylist named Freddie Leiba to do sittings for the magazine. "There was probably pressure from management and Veronica," says a Mazzola-era editor. Leiba's first photos landed on the January 1989 cover, and, as Michele Mazzola once told me, "Everything started changing."

By fall, the Mazzolas were crowing. Ad pages were up. "The numbers are unbelievable," Tony said. "We have dramatic—thank God—evidence of approval." Sitting behind a brass plaque that read DIRETTORE, Tony concluded, "We're going to change fashion-publishing history."

It didn't work out that way. The Mazzolas fell out with Leiba in mid-1990. "Freddie had the last word," says another *Bazaar* editor. So as time went by, "[Michele] would try to clip his wings. The minute he went on shoots, she'd change everything. So Freddie just left." After Leiba's departure in November, "the magazine started looking awful again." (Leiba says he left on good terms.)

That year, Veronica Hearst embarked on what seemed like a calculated campaign to drive Mazzola from his job. And Claeys Bahrenburg, who'd been appointed Hearst Magazines president in March, seemed content to let her. Somehow Mazzola survived the spectacle (reported like a serial by the press) of various would-be *Bazaar* chiefs passing through Hearst's living room and Bahrenburg's office.

Mazzola's fate was probably sealed at the Council of Fashion

Designers of America awards dinner in February 1991. Though the evening was underwritten by Hearst Magazines, the CFDA chose to honor Anna Wintour with a special award. She chose Carrie Donovan—briefly her boss at *Bazaar*—to introduce her.

"Carrie had called Hearst and suggested that she and another *Times* editor run *Bazaar* together," says a Mazzola editor. "She was turned down flat. So she got up and blasted Tony."

Donovan—who denies she talked to Hearst—vowed onstage and proceeded to ramble through a fourteen-minute introduction. She said Wintour had been fired by Anthony Mazzola, who thought she was "too fashionable or something." As she meandered through Wintour's many accomplishments, Mazzola looked pained, slunk down in his seat, rubbed his eyes, and wrung his hands. Finally, Wintour took the stage and broke the tension. "I'm totally mortified," she said. For a moment, Mazzola smiled.

"That speech was a key factor," says one of his employees. "Hearst's whole upper echelon was there. They underwrote the evening. They were like men who'd just come out of the cave. They finally got the message. Hearst was totally embarrassed by Tony Mazzola that night. He was in agony." Still, he held on as Veronica Hearst kept up her guerrilla campaign against him and Anna Wintour took Manhattan, running benefits, putting society types and columnists on her masthead, helping rewrite the social codes. Often, the fizz around her was as impressive as her magazine.

Finally, last July, Mazzola's suffering seemed to be reaching its apex. At Valentino's Paris couture show at the Palais de Chaillot, *Women's Wear Daily's* John Fairchild pulled him behind a marble pillar. Mazzola returned to his seat, shut his eyes, and seemed to shiver through the fashion show. *WWD* soon reported rumors that Liz Tilberis was coming to America, as well as denials from Hearst, which was rumored to have just given the Mazzolas new contracts.

LIKE WINTOUR, ELIZABETH TILBERIS WAS PUT through the wringer by the British press, which delighted in printing her dress size (14) in headline type. More seriously, perhaps, the press also stirred up trouble where Tilberis says there was none. In March 1990, for example, it was reported that she'd left the name of Condé Nast's new managing director, Nicholas Coleridge, off British *Vogue's* masthead in a fit of pique. Then came the stories that she'd accepted a job at *Bazaar*, then had her salary doubled to stay at Condé Nast. At the time, she wouldn't discuss this. Today, she is no less taciturn when we meet in a wood-paneled dining room in Hearst's Eighth Avenue headquarters. Her office, around the corner at *Esquire*, is apparently off limits. The site of the interview has been a point of concern. This place seems calculated to send the message that she speaks for Hearst and its executives, who clearly don't want to speak about the company's recent past.

Tilberis runs quickly through her résumé. Bea Miller "edited by magic," she says. "An enormous amount of what I do now comes from her incessant training." When Miller retired, "I certainly didn't think I should be editor of *Vogue*. It never crossed my mind." Anna Wintour "made changes, of course. Excellent changes. We did less whimsy. We did a lot of running on the street." Tilberis almost went to Ralph Lauren because she was tired of traveling—and England. She stayed in London because "you don't get offered the editorship of *Vogue* too often in life."

Did she leave Coleridge's name off her masthead? "I did do it to make a point," she says. "I seriously believe to this day that magazine editors don't need editorial directors. Nicholas is a very nice man. It's nothing personal."

But Coleridge and Tilberis disagree on more than the role of the editorial director. "We first heard of an approach [from Hearst to Tilberis] in June 1991," Coleridge says. "We talked with her." In July, top *Bazaar* editors were told Tilberis had been hired by Hearst. A key Condé Nast source says Tilberis was kept in the fold with a financial inducement, one given with

the understanding that she wouldn't talk to *Bazaar* again.

Tilberis is adamant that she didn't talk to anyone from Hearst in June. "What I do remains secret," she says. If the two versions are irreconcilable, "let it remain a clash—I know what I did." She says Hearst called in October. "It took a while. I wanted to find out how committed they were. They are totally committed to do the magazine I would like to see done." In early December, Mazzola "announced his plan to retire early next year or as soon as a successor is found," according to a press statement. Assurances in hand, Tilberis signed up January 6.

The fashion network has it that Tilberis left because of friction with Coleridge and his boss, young Jonathan Newhouse, Si's cousin. In February, she was quoted in the *Daily Express* as saying she "couldn't put up with" Condé Nast's "schoolboy management" and preferred "the gentlemen" at Hearst. "I read that at the time, and I remember thinking, Did I really say that?" Tilberis recalls. "I don't think I said it to anyone who could print it—or that I thought it, actually."

"No one had a complaint about her whatsoever," says a source at Condé Nast's London office. "But there was a slight feeling it was time for a change. Certainly I don't think it took anybody here more than a day or two to get over their shock—perhaps not that long."

Hearst's offer was an irresistible challenge, and even at the low end of the salary range (thought to be anywhere from \$300,000 to \$1.5 million), it is a hefty deal. Tilberis won't talk about her salary, except to say that the rumors are "bulls---." She deals with the firings at *Bazaar* just as directly. "A magazine is a team, and the senior people are the editor's team. I provide the continuity. It's Liz Tilberis. This business is very tough, and I'm very sorry, but that's life." Her attitude about the embargo on photographers is more Machiavellian. "I think it's an unfortunate thing to do," she says darkly, "because it's possible it may have an adverse effect on the photographers' attitude toward Condé Nast."

Finally, she talks about her plans. Fabien Baron will keep his advertising company and stay at *Bazaar* "as long as he wants to, and I hope that's a long, long time." His controversial redesigns and brief reigns at Italian *Vogue* and *Interview* don't bother Tilberis. "He's got the energy and strength I admire."

Certainly, Baron's hiring says a great deal about Tilberis's intentions. His previous magazine work—highlighted by strong photographs and bold use of type, often at the expense of text—has been among the most exciting in fashion in recent years. And he is closely associated with Meisel, the era's top fashion photographer. But he was fired by *Interview* after six issues. And he's said to have alienated key editors and photographers. "Unfortunately, he's too limited in too many ways to be as good as he's supposed to be," says someone who knows him.

Baron is obviously good at shaking up magazines—and people. But although his appointment has excited those who like the cutting edge, it also worries some who see his style as too extreme for Hearst. Alexander Liberman says he welcomes "challenges that give vitality and jolts" but scoffs at magazines like the Baron-era Italian *Vogue* that become "albums for the



TILBERIS IN NEW YORK.

Says Tilberis, "This business is very tough, and I'm very sorry, but that's life."

continues. "The envelope is the same, and we'll have to share."

Si Newhouse agrees with Pagniez. "New ideas add something for everybody," he says. "There is always room for one more." Adds *Vogue* publisher Fuchs, "If advertisers can only afford two pages, they're not going to take risks. They'll come to *Vogue* as long as we keep delivering. And we're showing force everywhere we're going." Indeed, at this month's fashion shows, *Vogue* was represented by packs of editors—sometimes as many as two dozen at one show. Tilberis, on the other hand, frequently looked lonely, sitting with Fabien Baron and Scia Scia Gambaccini and a few junior editors.

Older hands in the fashion game profess optimism. Polly Mellen, who was gently removed from *Vogue* after Wintour's arrival (ending up as a contract editor at *Allure*), has high hopes. "They're going to be rivals, and it's going to be exciting," she says. "It brings out the best in people and the meanest, and it has to be that way."

Richard Avedon's presence in *Vogue* faded further after Wintour's arrival. Though he had several months remaining on his contract to shoot covers for the magazine, Wintour rejected all his attempts, and he, in turn, said no when she asked him to return to shooting fashion pages. "Believe me, I didn't need another cover of *Vogue*," Avedon says, laughing.

At Diana Vreeland's 1989 memorial service, he took a swipe at fashion editors that many saw as a direct shot at Wintour. That's not what it was, he says, though he does reaffirm his belief that today's fashion editors are "just advertising departments with legs and high heels." Unlike so many others who've been forced to choose between Hearst and Condé Nast, Avedon is now working happily with both. He has a ten-book contract with Newhouse's Random House and an upcoming retrospective at the Whitney that is likely to be underwritten by Hearst and Eastman Kodak. Tilberis and Bahrenburg approached him to return to *Bazaar*, but he told them his schedule wouldn't allow it. Meisel may be on top of fashion; Avedon is beyond it.

So what does this survivor of 40 years of fashion wars think of this latest battle? "Fashion magazines are the mother of invention," he says. "May the best mother win." ■

ego of photographers. If Meisel dominates the *Bazaar* as he demands, I feel sorry for *Bazaar*."

Baron is stressing teamwork. "Everything is about ego now," he says. "The way to do something great is to leave the ego at the door." Specifically, he feels that fashion editors—not photographers—should relinquish the control they've been given over pictures and layouts. "They don't have the time to concentrate on the clothes—which is their job," he says. "People in the street are ready to see new things. People are ready to jump into the next century instead of worrying about the past."

SO WHAT DOES THE future hold? "Competition is scary and good," says *Elle*'s publication director, Régis Pagniez. And with his magazine's circulation at 900,000, he says he sees no need for radical change. "The problem is the advertising," he