

India's Colorful Culture



PHOTOS BY PAULINE VAN LYNDEN

NEW YORK — Pauline Van Lynden's love affair with India came on fast and furious during her first visit to the country in 1988. She's been smitten ever since, making 25 trips in 15 years. During her stays, she photographed the sights for posterity and took volumes of notes for her own edification, never dreaming that any of it would one day be published.

"I went to India by chance," she says. "I was invited by friends to join them on a trip to Central India. My children were very young at the time, and I thought it was absurd."

"When I went to Rajasthan for the first time, I had no intention of doing a book," she adds. "After a while, I real-



Assouline boutique at Bergdorf Goodman. A basic edition for \$65 is available in bookstores and on the Assouline Web site.

Van Lynden, who lives in Utrecht in the heart of Holland, has no formal training as a photographer or writer, but she has artistic genes: her mother is a painter, as was her grandmother. Trained as an art bookbinder, she went to art school 10 years ago to study painting and drawing.

"I come from a family where we've been taught to look at things," she says. "India gave me the photography. I still don't consider myself to be a professional photographer. The whole thing is still a sort of wonder."

WWD

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"When I went to Rajasthan for the first time, I had no intention of doing a book," she adds. "After a while, I realized I had all these pictures."

Two years ago, Van Lynden began organizing her photos into "Rajasthan," undoubtedly one of the most elegant and revealing books about India. She showed the finished product to Lee Stern, a buyer at Barnes & Noble, whom she met through mutual friends. Stern took one look and recommended Assouline, a Paris-based publishing house specializing in style-driven books on subjects such as art, fashion and photography.

Van Lynden remembers that it took owner Prosper Assouline exactly five minutes to decide to publish her book.

"This book has something special," says Assouline by phone from Paris. "I immediately loved the book because it's not a book about pictures, it's a book about feelings. It's 15 years in somebody's life."

Assouline was so taken with Van Lynden's work, he decided to publish a luxury limited edition of 150 copies, printed on matte cotton paper edged in gold and covered in ombré silk. The books are wrapped in vintage saris from Rajasthan and sell for \$600 at the



Clockwise from top left: The spring festival at Rohet; a colorful wedding turban, and Henna designs on hands and feet.

feet. There are close-ups of looms, threads, pigments and block prints. Van Lynden can make even something as mundane as a turban drying in the sun look beautiful, the long stretch of white fabric unfurled against ragged bushes.

Van Lynden sees Rajasthan through an unvarnished lens. "The poverty is a very difficult question," she says. "There are terrible situations, but somehow there's a dignity in India. It's obvious that there are contrasts and the book shows those contrasts."

Each page of the book is a series of intricate collages. Van Lynden made the collages without the use of a computer. Her only tools were scissors and a scalpel. "I knew my pictures," she says. "I knew there were images that would add repetition or color. When the collages were finished, I would lay them down on the floor and see if the sequence was good."

"The sequence had to do not only with the subjects, but the rhythms," she adds. "I didn't make the collages completely random."

Van Lynden's next book subject, the coast of Holland, will keep her closer to home. "It's a different set of colors," she says. "It's almost black and white."

After that, Van Lynden is planning to return to India to focus on the Tamil Nadu region near Madras.

"It's very tropical and very green," she says. "It's a completely different culture than Rajasthan. They don't speak the same language, and the whole life they lead is very different. I think the two books will make a very good pair."

— Sharon Edelson

Fashion Scoops

DIOR DAYS: The star system wasn't born yesterday, as a holiday photo exhibit in Dior's Paris boutiques shows. Culled from the house's archives, the black-and-white images include **Sophia Loren**, the Duchess of Windsor and Jane Russell, all dressed in designs by the late couturier. There are also snapshots of the actresses Dior costumed for the silver screen, including **Lauren Bacall** in "How to Marry a Millionaire," **Marlene Dietrich** in "Stage Fright," and **Ingrid Bergman** in "Indiscreet."

CRUISIN' IN TOWN: For those of you who think there's no such thing as a free ride, from Dec. 20 to 23, Dior will offer complimentary limo service to holiday shoppers going to their "next shopping destination" at its 57th Street Boutique in a brand-new, souped-up Mercedes S500. No in-store purchase is necessary, and the chauffeur is available on a first-come, first-served basis. (There's just one Benz, but its doors are decorated with Dior decals.) Manhattan destinations only, so no trying to get the driver to take you to "the magazine stand at Newark Airport" or the "Chanel on Rodeo Drive."

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India has attracted designers such as Yves Saint Laurent, Oscar de la Renta and Diane von Furstenberg, who called the country "the most inspiring thing in the world."

Van Lynden could hardly agree more. She captured the colors and textures of Rajasthan, India's second-largest state, located in the arid northwest of the country along the border with Pakistan. "The Rajasthani people's amazing sense of color can be seen as a natural reaction to the general atmosphere of sand and dust," she surmises.

In addition to shooting wide vistas of ancient forts, hills and lakes, Van Lynden homes in on details such as colorful handmade paper, silver leaf on deities in a temple, roof tiles, the folds of a potter's turban and henna designs on hands and

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