

# ★ STAR MAN

## Thierry Mugler (1948– )

He's the man responsible for *Dynasty* shoulder pads, power suits and the number one fragrance in France – and last year he underwent a radical physical makeover. Annemarie Luck looks back at Thierry Mugler's unusual life of fetish and fantasy

**L**ast year Thierry Mugler changed his name to Manfred. After going into semi-retirement, Mugler was reported to be lifting weights obsessively and dabbling in muscle-building 'supplements', and before long had radically transformed himself into a replica of Arnold Schwarzenegger in his *Terminator* heyday. No stranger to the fine line between fantasy and reality, the 60-year-old French fashion designer now seemed to have eliminated the border completely. But this is Mugler's world, where models wear cigarettes through holes in their fingernails, so if muscle-mary Manfred is who you want to be, well, why not?

Around 30 years before he morphed into Manfred, Mugler was redefining the female silhouette by putting models into lethal-looking cone-shaped bras and chrome corsets. Mugler was the first to bring sci-fi, SM and Hollywood to the runways, and women around the world have him to thank for the power suit.

His sometimes shocking, sometimes unsettling, but always innovative designs shifted the paradigms of fashion for nearly three decades. Then in 1997, he sold the House of Mugler to beauty and cosmetics giant Clarins and just

six years later the couture side of the business was closed.

Rumour has it that Mugler was resistant to working with the young designer who was brought in to revive the brand. Although usually described as kind and charming, Mugler is equally well-known for being an idealist and a perfectionist, so it's not surprising that any proposed collaboration would have been fraught. By then Mugler's signature giant shoulder-padded suits were *démodé* and while a handful of devotees continued to favour his *Dynasty*-style cuts, the rest of the world had moved on.

Still, even though the couture division of the company was shuttered, the Thierry Mugler brand had its massively successful fragrance line to carry it into the new millennium. The brand now boasts eight different scents, the most famous of which is *Angel*. Launched in 1993, *Angel* was the world's first flowerless fragrance, first blue fragrance, first to come in a star-shaped bottle and the first of the Thierry Mugler range.

It's said that Mugler had an encounter with a clairvoyant who read his fortune and told him that a star with one elongated arm would make him rich. This is apparently where the idea for the *Angel* bottle came from, although Mugler

had been quoted as saying that the star symbol is a 'long-term obsession' that goes back to his childhood, when he spent hours gazing at the stars: 'They were soothing and reassuring, both magical and real. Even today, in moments when life's hard, I think of the stars.'

Mugler designed clothes for the wife of Clarins founder Jacques Courtin-Clarins and it was she who reportedly encouraged her husband to launch the designer's first fragrance. Whether the psychic's prediction was accurate or not, the ground-breaking *Angel* was a massive success, even toppling Chanel No. 5 from its number-one position in the French fragrance market. It's held onto that position ever since.

**A**ngel's success could well be testament to Mugler's unique understanding of women – after all, what better way to attract the fairer sex than to add essences of chocolate, caramel, honey and vanilla to your fragrance mix? But Mugler had already proven his uncanny insight into women's desires years before. The one thing all his designs had in common was that they made women feel both powerful and sexy. One of his biggest fans, Ivana Trump, summed up

Opposite, clockwise from main picture Thierry Mugler; taking a bow after a show; Mugler's Fall/Winter Collection 95/96; looking bulked-up; Mugler's motorcycle dress, as seen in George Michael's 'Too Funky' music video; Mugler with fellow designer Jean Paul Gaultier.



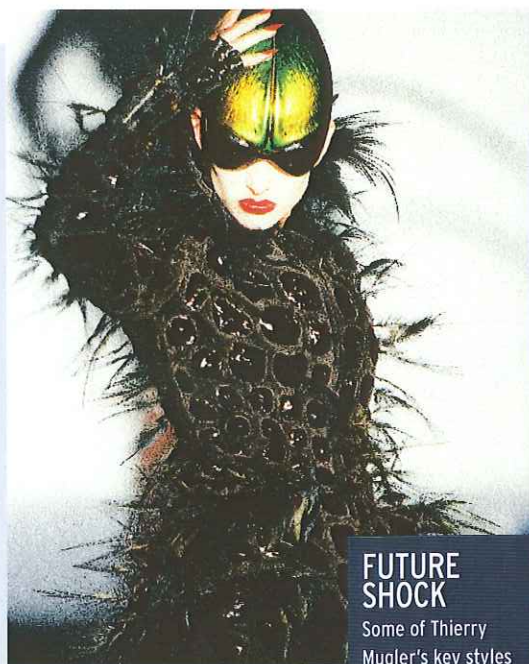
the Mugler effect by saying that his clothes 'make me feel so feminine and glamorous and empowered and desirable.'

Fabrics like latex and PVC brought out the wearer's inner dominatrix, while exquisitely tailored cuts with wasp waists, wide shoulders and panniered hips exaggerated the feminine form. They were clothes that made the wearer feel like a goddess. According to supermodel Iman, Mugler's designs needed to be worn with an 'at your own risk' sign because 'you will attract the bad, the naughty and the dangerous'.

Mugler, who became something of a gay icon over the years, has been accused of misogyny, thanks to the extreme nature of some of his designs. But he protested this label strongly: 'When people say my clothes are against women, it is because they are not easy to wear. You have to be in good shape to wear my clothes, [they] are more beautiful that way.' It would be interesting to know if Mugler already felt this way when he designed his first outfit for a girlfriend when he was just 14 years old.

Fourteen was a significant age for Mugler for another reason too - it was the year he fulfilled his childhood dream and joined the Rhine Opera ballet company as a dancer. This opened him up to the world of drama, stage effects, lighting and costume design and its impact on him was enormous. 'Dance has taught me much about the maintenance and organization of clothing,' he once said. In later years he would draw on his experiences as a ballet dancer and turn his fashion shows into spectacular theatrical performances featuring the likes of Seventies supermodel Pat Cleveland ascending to heaven as the Virgin Mary, or Jerry Hall (who was also the first face of Angel) as a modern-day Marlene Dietrich in diamanté-scattered nude chiffon.

**'I create clothes that men and women will wear in imaginary adventures. I produce and direct them'**



## FUTURE SHOCK

Some of Thierry Mugler's key styles and influences:

- \* The insect kingdom (above) - think 'wasp' waists - was a constant source of inspiration to Mugler. He chose stick-thin models to complement the look.

- \* Corset-type jackets were used to accentuate a hyper-feminine silhouette in which shapes and curves were defined with strict cuts.

- \* The 1980s padded jacket: it was strong, angular, almost cruel-looking (top right). Shoulders were wide and padded; waists were extremely narrow.
- \* Collars with exaggerated points, or flame-like cutouts (above right) were trademark details.
- \* Mugler also explored space and robot themes, and often used futuristic fabrics such as PVC, metal and plastic.



relationship). After his first *haute couture* collection in 1977, the media proclaimed Mugler to be 'the best designer in fashion'.

To celebrate the 10th anniversary of his company, Mugler staged another fashion first by holding a runway show with a paying audience. This had never been done before and 6 000 people attended the extravaganza at the Zenith in Paris. Another pioneering move by Mugler was to invite celebrity friends like Diana Ross and Sharon Stone to appear in his shows, pre-empting the era of celebrity models.

For years Mugler's role in his company was far more than that of mere designer. He was the brand custodian and creative visionary. Describing his role, he would say: 'Fashion doesn't suffice. I try to pass on a feeling, a sensation... I tell stories about women. From the spy to Madonna, the heroine,

the secretary. I create clothes that men and women will wear in imaginary adventures. I produce and direct them.'

No surprise then that Mugler has also made his mark in the worlds of photography, set design, and video and film direction. In 1978 he was working on an advertising campaign with photographer Helmut Newton and, irritated by Mugler's continuous direction, Newton apparently handed over his camera and said, 'Since you know so well what you want, do it yourself.' Following this, Mugler explored his passion for photography and published two books: *Thierry Mugler Photographer* (Rizzoli) and *Fashion Fetish Fantasy* (General Publishing Group). Other projects include making a short film, *Antimentale*, and directing and producing George Michael's 'Too Funky' music video, featuring his own infamous motorcycle dress. All of these exploits laid the groundwork for the two innovative television advertising campaigns that were produced to advertise his fragrances Alien, and now Angel. (The first-ever TV ad for Angel airs this month).

Although Mugler is now semi-retired, and despite the loss of the couture arm of the business, he is still involved with his brand's beauty products, which account for 80 per cent of the house's sales. In July, the new artistic director of the Thierry Mugler fashion house, Rosemary Rodriguez, revived his legacy at Paris couture week. Mugler was not personally involved, but his signature style was resuscitated in a Spring/Summer womenswear collection called Thierry Mugler Edition. After all these years, it seems that Mugler gowns, including the one worn by Naomi Watts on the red carpet at this year's 'Superheroes' Met Ball, have revived interest in the label.

In 1977, after presenting his first show collection, Mugler provided insight into his aesthetic with the words: 'We live in an age of searching, searching for new pleasures.' So not much has changed in the last 30 years, then. Except, of course, his name. ■

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# WIN!

This month 75 lucky *Marie Claire* readers will win a 25ml Thierry Mugler Eau de Star fragrance worth R495

**'I wanted to create a toilette version of Angel, something light and fresh but reminiscent of the fragrance.'**  
- *Thierry Mugler*

In its star-shaped, transparent bottle, Thierry Mugler Eau de Star was created for sensual, sexy and glamorous women and its fresh scent exudes oriental and aquatic essences of watermelon, patchouli and vanilla.

Eau de Star follows on from the hugely popular Thierry Mugler fragrances, Angel, Alien and A\*Men. Cult favourite Angel caught the world's attention with its star-shaped bottle and as the first gourmand perfume, while its follow-up fragrance - the unusual, enchanting and memory-evoking Alien - is captured in a jewel of a bottle. And in the notes of the tantalizing and playful A\*Men, created by Mugler as a nod to his childhood hero (the Silver Surfer of *Fantastic Four* comic-book fame), a free-spirited sensuality is expressed.

PHOTOGRAPHS RIANA VOGEL

## HOW TO ENTER

To stand a chance of winning one of 75 Eau de Star fragrances, send an SMS to 34776 by 30 November 2008. Don't use any punctuation and begin your SMS with MC 53 Thierry Mugler, followed by your name, surname and postal address. (R2 per SMS; see stockists page for competition rules.)

