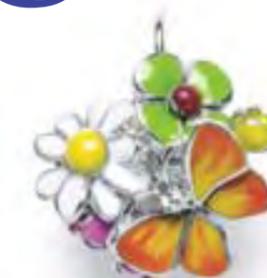




J'adore Dior!



A delightful encounter with eccentric jewellery designer, Victoire de Castellane

Maria Doultou

Jewellery designer Victoire de Castellane's studio in the eighth *arrondissement* in Paris is more Disney than Dior. A plastic Cinderella Castle is on a table in a corner, coloured lollipops decorate the arched windows, her children's pictures are tacked to the wall, Power Puff Girl stuffed toys are scattered over the sofa and a bowl of plastic sushi hangs directly behind her desk. Victoire's desk is a sea of coloured felt-tip pens, snow-globes, Mickey Mouse statuettes, Hello Kitty candy dispensers. A computer is tucked away on one side.

Behind the desk sits Victoire in a sea-green wrap dress decorated with cavorting mermaids. From under her poker-straight Cleopatra-style fringe, her almond-shaped brown eyes are twinkling as she beams a huge smile. By her hand is a coloured Post-it pad covered in sketches of jewels.

Victoire herself is only adorned with a simple gold ring and is not wearing a watch. "It is too hot to have on a large watch and I can tell the time on my phone," she says and picks up her mobile, covered in bright kiddie stickers.

A photograph pinned on the wall taken one hot summer shows Victoire at the age of perhaps 10, with the same haircut, the same impish grin and smiling eyes. It is since then that she has been intrigued by gems and played with the jewels that belonged to her grandmother, the elegant Sylvia Hennessy. Described as being original to the point of eccentricity, Victoire brings the confidence and flair of her great-great-uncle the Edwardian dandy Boni de Castellane to her carefree, irreverent and deliciously capricious designs. Before joining Dior in 1998 she had worked for Karl Lagerfeld at Chanel for 14 years, designing costume jewellery and accessories. She was

(Left) Injecting fun into jewellery design: Victoire de Castellane at her colourful studio in Paris, in her element.
(Above) 'Diorette' lacquer and white-gold earrings (€2,140).

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personally plucked from Lagerfeld’s clutches by Bernard Arnault, President of the LVMH Group to be designer for Dior’s Fine Jewellery department.

Huge and simple

And now it is to watchmaking that Victoire has brought her quirky designs. The first of her ‘La D de Dior’ watch collection was launched in 2004. For all the exuberance that surrounds Victoire, La D is surprisingly restrained, sober and free of detail. Its large dial is swept clean, save for two elegant, tapered hands. How did this come about?

Victoire giggles, which she does a lot throughout the 45-minute interview, mulls over the question and, with her head leaning to one side thoughtfully, slowly draws the following conclusion: “Watches are like my personality; huge and simple. I like extremes, either very big or very small, never in the middle. Mid-size is bourgeois and I always thought watches were too cutesy. The first watch I designed had to be classical and round.”

Victoire’s approach to designing a watch is surprisingly unaffected and candid. She states emphatically that she is not a watch designer *per se*, so her aims are very different from the usual goals of the industry that often make references to ‘tradition’, ‘horological excellence’ or ‘contemporary design’. She wants her watch to be much more; it has to be an evocative and reassuring object, and, in this, recalling the happy days of her childhood.

“Imagine the moment when, as a child, the father comes home from work and sits down with a whisky in his hand, the ice



(Above) Of her entire ‘La D de Dior’ watch range, Victoire’s favourite is this yellow-gold tiger’s eye dial model (£7,900), whose bezel measures 38 mm across – sizeable for a jewellery watch.

chinking,” explains Victoire evocatively, opening her long hands to capture the golden memory. “It is a moment that makes you feel that life is great. It is about the Seventies, when things weren’t so rushed. It is the sort of watch that Tony Soprano would wear; it is for a very virile man.”

Despite the direct influence of men’s watches, Victoire wasn’t going to just stop there. “I wanted a big watch for women but it had to be more like a jewel.” At this, she picks up from a velvet-lined tray a large yellow-gold La D on a gold bracelet – her favourite – and slips it onto her wrist. “I like my watch to be loose and to forget that it is actually a watch. Like this,” she says, waving her arm around to allow the watch move freely along her wrist like an oversized bangle. “It feels like it is a bijou.”

Eye of the tiger

“I hate trends and the idea that you have to change your watch every year. I wanted my watch to be reassuring, so quality was very important and it had to be well made. Also I don’t like too many details so I didn’t put numbers on my watches. It is paradoxical because I am very punctual but I don’t like my watches to be too precise, which is why there are no numbers on the dials of my watch. I wanted the watch to be

humorous and ‘sympathétique’.”

And thus, La D came about. The large, round face with its bulging crystal and bracelet are devoid of decoration save for an intricate plaid pattern engraved into the metal, which imitates the feel of a fabric. From the first gold and stainless-steel versions,



(Left) A particularly eye-catching La D de Dior watch from Dior Fine Jewellery, with a strap to match the bright royal-blue lapis lazuli dial (£5,995). (Centre) ‘Spiral’ La D, whose dial is delicately decorated with a vortex of diamonds (£3,900). (Right) Playfully pink La D with diamond-set bezel and indexes and mother-of-pearl dial (£1,975). (Below) Victoire’s ‘Délicate Rose Cut’ necklace (£3,730) with citrine, pink/green tourmaline, aquamarine, amethyst, iolite and yellow gold. (Bottom) A great example of Victoire de Castellane’s joyful approach to jewellery design, this amethyst, lacquer and yellow-gold ring (£5,450) is just a part of the ‘Diorlette’ collection characterised by its kaleidoscope of flowers, butterflies and ladybirds.

the collection has grown to include classic Seventies details such as hardstone dials. Tiger’s eye is one of Victoire’s favourites because it looks like silk and this year sees a turquoise face and a playful spiral pattern of diamonds decorating the dial.

As a jewellery designer though, it is surprising she hasn’t made more use of gems. “I find that diamonds on a watch can be very vulgar,” she comments wrinkling her nose and again bursting into laughter. “It can be pretentious and I prefer humour.”

As for the inner workings of the watches, Victoire is clear on where she stands. Recalling



working with the Swiss watchmakers, she rolls her eyes to the ceiling and says, “I don’t like technicality and I am absolutely not into mechanical complications. It is another world and if you enter into it, you have to do it completely and I am not into this obsession with watches.” For her, the functionality and ease of use of the watch is so important she was happy to work with quartz movements.

But Victoire soon has another meeting to attend and, click-clacking down the stone corridor, waves goodbye effusively. But before she leaves, I ask why she likes big watches. “They make you look slimmer!” was her instant reply. What more could a woman ask of a watch? ◉

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