

ALAIN TERZIAN AND STUDIOCANAL PRESENT

# AN HAUTE COUTURE COMEDY!

FANNY  
ARDANT

MARINA  
HANDS

ÉRIC  
ELMOSNINO

LAURENT  
STOCKER  
FROM LA COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE

# Chic!

A FILM BY JÉRÔME CORNUAU

**French release: 7 January 2015**

**Runtime: 103 minutes**

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# SYNOPSIS

The ruthless director H  l  ne Birk reigns over the prestigious haute couture fashion house led by the world-renowned designer Alicia Ricosi. Following her recent breakup, creative block gets the better of Alicia. However, the timing could not be worse, with the deadline of her next collection around the corner; H  l  ne must find a fast solution in order to help Alicia regain her creative mojo!

# AN INTERVIEW WITH JÉRÔME CORNUAU

## *What was your starting point for the film?*

The producer Alain Terzian offered me the script. I liked the idea of making a romantic comedy against the backdrop of the world of *haute couture*, without allowing it to slip into caricature. In addition to the flashy side of the fashion world, I wanted to show that underneath that veneer of luxury is a place where human relations don't really exist: unquestioning obedience is the order of the day. There are no second thoughts. It's a harsh world where everyone is ready to step on the next person's toes to get what they want. It's the same in a fair few professions. So I agreed to direct the movie, with the aim of reworking the characters and certain structural elements of the script. Alain shared my vision of the film and introduced me to the scriptwriter Jean-Paul Bathany so we could work together.

## *What changes did you want to make to the story and what did you want to keep?*

Firstly, Jean-Paul and I worked on the characters, refining them and adding detail. Hélène Birk, played by Marina Hands, became the central character through which we access the world of fashion and the financial stakes, through her eyes and subjectivity. Then we worked on Alicia (Fanny Ardant) and Julien (Eric Elmosnino). I thought it was important for Alicia to have a real creative breakdown, for the fire in her belly to go out completely. And then her meeting with Julien needed to trigger some kind of renaissance in her – his speech, his attitude, and his passion – everything that he encapsulates had to feed into the brilliance of her collection. In a sense, I wanted to bring a reality to all these characters to better develop the comedy.

In structural terms, we mainly focused our rewriting on the story arc, paying particular attention to the shift from comedy to romantic comedy – not considering it a done deal that the characters would fall in love with one another. We wanted to make them evolve, to discover one another, and to change their minds so that the love would emerge despite themselves and for the greater pleasure for the audience.

## *In terms of the direction, the film has a real elegance that fits perfectly with its theme.*

In all modesty, I took my inspiration from the great American comedies like those of Howard Hawks or Blake Edwards, with a fast rhythm and strong characters. I wanted to have fluidity in the performance and the way it was shot. If that comes across as elegance, then I'm delighted.

*In terms of the fashion setting for CHIC!, is that a world you know? Or one you find fascinating?*

From a strictly personal point of view, I find the visual aspect of this world extremely beautiful, and it's fascinating how it inspires a desire in all of us to correspond to the dictates of fashion whatever the cost, to dress for others rather than ourselves, to take on a different appearance if necessary, just as long as you appear. In financial terms, the fashion world is also incredibly powerful and there is a lot at stake. I have made advertising films for fragrances and beauty creams so I know a little about how it all works backstage, although I have no experience of the world of haute couture. I was slightly concerned I might be hypnotized by it – no doubt scared of being caught up in its clutches and only able to capture a caricatured image of it. So I did a lot of research. I read biographies of designers, I went to runway shows, and I watched documentaries to try and get a handle on it without any preconceptions and without a desire to highlight a particular aspect of it. I simply tried to be fair and authentic. I had a lot of help from Pierre-Jean Larroque, my costume designer. Through his talent and his experience in fashion, theater, opera and cinema, he was able to help me weave a world that ended up as pretty realistic.

I also wanted to get to grips with Julien's world – that of a country lad, a landscape artist, with the same attention to detail and reconstruction. When I was scouting for locations in Brittany, I met a landscape gardener who studied his art in Japan. He introduced us to his world with the same passion as the fashion designers had. In fact, we ended up shooting at his place.

*Tell us something about the dialog in CHIC! which hits very hard at times. The words are very cruel, and that in an extremely elegant visual universe...*

With a title like that, the film had to be beautiful and elegant! I worked on the sets so they would fit into a Cinemascope frame, taking care to ensure the camera movements were fluid, that they worked for the characters, the rhythm and the biting back-and-forths. In addition to being a great screenwriter, Jean-Paul Bathany has a unique skill with dialog and an unstoppable sense of humor. In the mouths of these actors, his words become absolute gems.

We are dealing here with people who are simply odious towards one another, in a kind of pyramid of power where sarcasm is king. I met a lot of people who weren't very nice in the pampered world of cosmetics. It never ceased to amaze me – while we were supposed to be selling something marvelous, certain people behaved in an execrable manner. I wanted that to be in the background in this film, but with the idea that one can nonetheless understand such people in order to like them better, to become fond of them. That was important for the love story between H el ene and Julien: they each had to evolve and take a step towards the other, they each had to bring something to the other and change their perception of the other.

*In the end, CHIC! is a film with a real freedom in terms of its shape and tone...*

I honestly didn't plan that. My only ambition was to make a coherent, elegant film that was fun to watch and peopled with realistic, moving, and funny characters. It's no doubt something you learn as you make films over the years – to have a precise idea of the direction, of the acting, the sets, the color codes, and the music, and to know how to get those ideas over to your crew. In the past, I've felt trapped by scripts that didn't really suit me. But with this film, I paid particular attention to the characters, the rhythm, and the dialog, while always making sure I didn't get tied up in it.

CHIC! is the sum of everything I've done until now, and it's thanks to those other films that I was able to make this one. I'll no doubt return to comedy again – I might go even further next time! – but I'll always have an eclectic approach, with varied tastes and desires.

# FANNY ARDANT

## ALICIA

It's always complicated to give the reasons that drive one to accept a particular role: you like a character, or you don't like them. The desire is always obscure. When I was offered the role of Alicia, I immediately liked her and I was also keen to see how she evolved. I liked her and her world – I felt that Alicia ennobled everything around her, through her passion for her art. Fashion, architecture, and gastronomy are arts that ennoble people; they allow them to grow within beauty. We could all dress in potato sacks, live in cages and eat plants... But no, everything has been transformed into something more beautiful.

I prefer window-shopping to fashion shows. You walk down the street and suddenly, you spot something you like and you stop, finding beauty in shapes and colors in the middle of the city and in the middle of life.

I didn't know anything about the world of couture or fashion. To become Alicia, I did what dogs do when they just head off into the forest and see what scents they might pick up and what discoveries they might make.

Alicia is a designer who starts with nothing and reinvents an entire world.

She doesn't just fall in love with this landscape gardener – she is totally overwhelmed by him, by what he inspires in her, he being also inspired by trees and vegetation. Suddenly, this new thing invades her world.

I need to like the person I'm playing, so that they can teach me or bring out things that are in me. I don't need others to like my character. I could easily play the role of public enemy number one or a terrorist. I'm not bothered either way. I understand Alicia. She is right: one must never compromise. She doesn't care about financial or fashion diktats. It doesn't matter. She just goes for what she wants.

My relationship with the director is also very important. There's no point talking for hours sometimes, you just need to talk about a couple of details that may be minor but which shed light on the role and the director's approach over time. I liked talking to Jérôme; I liked his intelligence, his quick thinking, how he listens, and his sophistication. He knew how to make Alicia a real person, not a facile caricature.

Like the theater, cinema is very pragmatic. Once you are on set, things seem to mysteriously fall into place. An exchange takes place on a subconscious level.

# ÉRIC ELMOSNINO

## JULIEN

This project was based on a story that immediately appealed to me. It has all the ingredients for a good comedy, with these characters who are initially have nothing to do with one another, and who end up finding things in common, and some even falling in love. The character of Julien appealed to me because he had this slightly rough side, a simple relationship with life, but he's also quite a sophisticated guy in the way he approaches his work as a landscape gardener, as though it's a kind of art. And it's no coincidence that Alicia falls for him. Right at the start, I was a bit surprised to be offered this role because I imagined Julien to be physically a much bigger guy. But I very soon realized that was silly – he had no reason to be hulking – neither physically nor mentally.

That was when I decided to come on board, and it helped that there were a lot of lovely scenes involving my character. And at last I got my chance to work with Marina Hands, whom I've known for a long time, and also to meet Fanny Ardant.

As for the two worlds that structure for the film, I have to say that I knew nothing whatsoever about fashion. However, having done tons of different jobs between the ages of 15 and 18, I have had experience working in horticulture. Although the memory isn't a particularly pleasant one, of greenhouses at 50°C, which meant that I never wanted to see a pot of flowers ever again! Of course, that has nothing to do with Julien, who is a real artist in his field. We shot in Brittany on a real landscape gardener's estate, whose house was the set for mine in the film. It was a magnificent place, and it was that guy who stood in for me in those scenes where I'm at the top of the tree – I refused to go up there.

But to come back to what made me accept the role, I'd say that the most important thing for me is the writing. And between the first version of Jérôme's script and the version we shot, there was a lot of work on making things more realistic. It's perhaps a slightly naïve desire, but I like characters who are involved in their lives. These days, I need that notion of pleasure to shoot, and that goes for the both the director and for my acting partners. I can't put myself through a wringer or accept grinding out a film anymore.

# MARINA HANDS

## HÉLÈNE

Hélène is a modern young woman, caught up in her ambition to such an extent that she has forgotten what is essential in life. Like many others, Hélène has staked everything on her career, and although she may come across as professionally very mature, her emotional immaturity is equally as striking. So she has to start learning things in life that she's failed to acquire naturally, and which have nothing to do with success. I can really identify with this kind of character because I love people who make mistakes and trip up. I also liked her bravery and her capacity for personal growth. I feel like I meet a lot of Hélène Birks in my daily life, locked in their professional bubble and very demanding, with a desire to be competent and recognized as such. While that is of course, extremely commendable, it has consequences for both their personality and their behavior. They become more rigid, insensitive to how the world works, and incapable of understanding how they might be different to others. As a Parisian, I have to say I often feel like I'm surrounded by people like that, who are totally focused on their work or on their world. And this is not a film that only critiques the fashion world. Above all, it's a realistic vision of modern society. Working in a huge company with all its hierarchies and huge financial stakes naturally has consequences for the people in that world.

From a personal point of view, I've always been fascinated by fashion designers as artists. As a young girl, I was interested in their personalities, I loved hearing them talking about their work, explaining in minute detail how such a dress is made, and about their passion for fabric. I became very interested in that idea of combining the notion of industry with that of creation, of being original whilst appealing to as many people as possible. I found that paradox very amusing. Whenever I meet them, I'm never disappointed, whether its Christian Lacroix, Guillaume Henry or Jean-Paul Gaultier – every time, these great designers amaze me with their curiosity and their talent, of course. And that's one of the questions raised by the film – what happens when they are about to embark upon a collection when suddenly, they are totally lacking in inspiration?

# LAURENT STOCKER

## ALAN

It's always interesting to play roles that differ greatly to one's own character. I liked how Alan is kind of falling apart and I appreciated his craziness. I saw him as a blue-chip company boss who likes to run his company with an iron fist, a little like how Louis de Funès would play such a character! I like that register of comedy where characters tip into burlesque, and Alan is one of those. He's sometimes almost caricatured but that's what makes him interesting – his cowardliness, and his greed for power. His world is a very cruel one and his words are equally cruel, as if they are a reaction to how he is treated by his superiors, like a kind of payback.

What I like about the role was that it wasn't about finding excuses, but rather reasons as to why he's become what he has become. I saw him as a very sensitive man who must have suffered a great deal, and absolutely not as some sadistic twisted person. The film also denounces that obligation to meet financial targets that can turn human beings into machines.

When he's with the dancers, we feel his desire to have fun break the surface, but it's soon pulled back down by his meanness and obsession to fire everyone, to chop their head off. Even if he only does that figuratively, I think in modern society, it does just as much harm. It's as if he's enacting his own Reign of Terror. I've worked with characters like him before in the theater – Richard III for example. His name – Alan Bergam – is right out of Shakespeare's history plays, and his colorful clothes are so British. And talking of theater, it's funny because we were like a little theater troupe on this shoot. I've worked with Marina at La Comédie Française, with Eric at l'Odéon, and with Fanny in an adaptation of "Snow White" for Arte, so it was a lot of fun. In the end, I was able to fully explore everything I wanted for the character of Alan because Jérôme Cornuau was so open and such an attentive director.

# AN INTERVIEW WITH ALAIN TERZIAN

*The project to make CHIC! goes way back before the director came on board. Why were you so determined to produce it some day?*

I've always been fascinated by the encounter between actors, characters and different worlds. And in this film, there was the idea of a confrontation between the world of luxury and the natural world, between industry and environment, and all of it wrapped up in the concept of creation. The character of the landscape gardener played by Eric Elmosnino says at one point, "I'm a creator too. I'm even God's assistant!" I liked the idea that all these things would go head-to-head, that the characters over time would become tamed. In this story, there is comedy, derision, and sometimes a kind of poetry that I really enjoyed.

*You chose Jérôme Cornuau to direct the film, allowing him to rework the script quite significantly...*

To my mind, producing a film is often about supplying an idea, but also about allowing a director to make a project his or her own. That's exactly what Jérôme did, and CHIC! is his film now. A director has to have a vision, a passion, and a creative energy, and Jérôme was amazing in that regard. He brought each character to life and reinvented them. The way he directed the actors was also remarkable. Look at how he took Fanny Ardant – a major star with an incredible career behind her who did some brilliant work with Truffaut – and made her even greater. To put it shortly, I might have had the idea for CHIC! but the film you see today is all Jérôme Cornuau's.

*You produced THE VISITORS and films by Danièle Thompson – would you say that the tone of the film shows that these days, one can write comedies outside the usual mold?*

Basically, comedy has always been anchored in socio-cultural subjects and it's exciting to work with that through some kind of extravagance or self-mockery. So the audience becomes attached to the characters and the authenticity they convey. While CHIC! is a comedy from start to finish, it's also a film that says a lot about the world of luxury, which is one of the glories of France around the world, thanks to the talent of our designers.

# CAST

FANNY ARDANT

ALICIA RICOSI

MARINA HANDS

HÉLÈNE BIRK

ÉRIC ELMOSNINO

JULIEN LEFORT

LAURENT STOCKER

ALAN BERGAM

CATHERINE HOSMALIN

CAROLINE LANGER

PHILIPPE DUQUESNE

JEAN GUY

INDIA HAIR

KARINE LEFORT

# CREW

DIRECTOR	JÉRÔME CORNUAU
PHOTOGRAPHY	STÉPHANE CAMI
FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	LAURE PRÉVOST
SET DESIGN	DENIS MERCIER
COSTUMES	PIERRE-JEAN LARROQUE
EDITING	BRIAN SCHMITT
SOUND	LUCIEN BALIBAR AYMERIC DEVOLDÈRE HERVÉ BUIRETTE
SCREENPLAY AND DIALOGS	JEAN-PAUL BATHANY
MUSIC	RENÉ AUBRY
PUBLISHED BY	T.FILMS/STUDIOCANAL
PRODUCTION MANAGER	FRANÇOIS HAMEL
LINE PRODUCER	MICHEL SCHMIDT
PRODUCED BY	ALAIN TERZIAN
A COPRODUCTION FROM	ALTER FILMS STUDIOCANAL FRANCE 2 CINÉMA
WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF	CANAL+ CINÉ+ FRANCE TÉLÉVISIONS