



## Fashion

ONE OF BARCELONA'S OLDEST FASHION BOUTIQUES, SANTA EULÀLIA, PRESENTS AN EXHIBITION OF ITS STYLISH HISTORY

■ **Santa Eulalia: *Espíritu de mujer* can be seen until April 15**

# Fashion homage to the past

MARTA WENDLINGER

● One doesn't expect to see a fashion exhibition in a shop on Passeig de Gràcia, but that's exactly what's happening at Barcelona's venerable shop, Santa Eulàlia, from March 10 to April 15. The show's impetus is the inauguration of a new luxury *prêt-à-porter* section for women featuring renowned international designers such as Marc Jacobs, Balenciaga, Stella McCartney, Lanvin, Etro, Narciso Rodríguez, Jimmy Choo and Versace.

### An elegant setting

The shop windows invite you in with a collection of Balenciaga and Lanvin pieces beautifully displayed on a bed of red rose petals. Once inside, however, you may get a bit confused to find yourself in the men's section, but as you walk up the carved wooden staircase, the exhibition begins: *Santa Eulàlia: The Spirit of Woman: an Anthology of Haute Couture: 1926 to 1999*. It exudes simplicity and elegance at its best, reflecting the store's consistent style and grace, and highlighting key moments of creativity in Barcelona's haute couture at a time when Europe's most elegant women came here to have dresses custom-made by designers such as Pedro Formosa, Juan Serra, Jorge Olesti and Pedro Morales, all of which made the shop a symbol of



The exhibition *Santa Eulàlia: The Spirit of Woman: an Anthology of Haute Couture: 1926 to 1999* offers a tour of dressmaking elegance over the last 80 years.

"modern living" for the Spanish bourgeoisie.

### A history of style

The main hallway features a chronology of Santa Eulalia's history. Though small, the show is so tastefully done that it's worth a visit. Dresses in organdy, silk, lace from the '60s, stunning velvet capes, exquisite and sen-

sual black cocktail dresses in silk, crepe, and taffeta. They are in different styles and from different eras but women today would be thrilled to wear them. There is a light pink, strapless dress with silver brocade, and a pale blue robe with pearls and precious stones around the cuffs...they look too rarified ever to have been worn.

In the background, soft jazz is interspersed with a series of radio clips and an excellent video that showcases the store's most important historical moments.

*Santa Eulalia: Espiritu de mujer* is on at Passeig de Gràcia 93 until April 15

## BCN's pioneers of haute couture

The high fashion shop on Passeig de Gràcia has been at the forefront of dressmaking since 1926

NEIL STOKES

● As 'high dressmaking' does not sound right, it is not surprising that the English language has adopted the French expression 'haute couture' to describe top-quality, made-to-measure clothes. While originally used to refer to French fashion, the term has come to cover all high-level fashion; more often than not it refers to any unique stylish design made to order for wealthy and high-status clients. Nevertheless, in France, the label "haute couture" is a protected appellation and the haute couture houses belong to the professional union, the *Chambre Syn-*

*dicale de la Haute Couture.*

The French term for ready-to-wear fashion is *prêt-à-porter* and, now, every haute couture house also markets *prêt-à-porter* collections, which typically deliver a higher return on investment than their custom clothing. In fact, much of the haute couture displayed at fashion shows today is never sold at all; it is created to enhance the good name of the house. Falling revenues have forced a few houses to abandon their unprofitable couture division and concentrate solely on the less prestigious *prêt-à-porter*.

For its part, Santa Eulalia,



A photograph taken in 1941 at a fashion show to celebrate the opening of the Santa Eulalia shop on Barcelona's Passeig de Gràcia.

which was founded in 1843 in the Pla. de la Boqueria, was one of the first places in Spain to provide a new type of fashion presentation with live models rather than dummies. The shop

began to deal in haute couture in 1926 with a novelty, later copied by other establishments: having its own catwalk on which to present its fashionable wares. It continued this tradition until re-

cent times: the last fashion parade there took place in 1999. Santa Eulalia has an international presence, showing its collections in New York and in Venice.