



Fashion

PASARELA GAUDÍ
NOVIAS GETS THE
BALL ROAMING ON
MAY 29 WHILE
FROM JUNE 1-3 THE
BRIDAL FASHION
INDUSTRY GETS ON
WITH BUSINESS

Here comes the bride

Barcelona braces itself for an invasion by the world of high fashion in Bridal Week-Noviaespaña 2007

CATALONIA TODAY

● Big names are always a must for any fashion event worth its salt and Barcelona's Bridal Week-Noviaespaña 2007 will be no different. Legendary designer Karl Lagerfeld will open Pasarela Gaudí Novias on May 29, while Elie by Elie Saab will close the event on May 31.

What will follow is two more days of non-stop catwalk action, showcasing the brightest and the best of bridal fashion in Fira de Barcelona's Gran Via site.

Apart from welcoming a litany of established designers and major bridal fashion houses – including collections from Pronovias and Valentino - Gaudí

Novias will once again highlight the raw talents of up-and-coming designers.

The fashion fest continues with the opening of Bridal Week-Noviaespaña 2007 on June 1. This year's trade fair – the 17th edition of the event – will have more than 150 companies in attendance. More than 20,000 square metres will be taken up by stands and catwalks as professionals do deals and check out what's what in the world of bridal fashion. Among the foreign contingent will be firms from Belgium and Holland, via Israel, and Turkey to the United States.

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More than 200 brands will be on show over the week

Sensibility and simplicity

With Barcelona's Bridal Week about to start, we speak to wedding dress designers Maria Teresa and Marta Raich from local company Novia d'Art

MARTA WENDLINGER

● In 1966, siblings Carmen and Rafael Raich, along with Angela Farré (Rafael's wife), founded Novia d'Art in the heart of the Barcelona's Gràcia neighbourhood. Carmen had already been designing wedding dresses for Barcelona's "high society" brides, but her brother, Rafael, realizing the huge success that her designs were having, decided to invest in creating a new prêt à porter collection. At the time, few boutiques existed that specialized in the market, but Rafael built up the business until it was consolidated in the national market. The company continued to expand and now exports its creations to countries as far away as Chile, Mexico, and Argentina.

These days, Novia d'Art is run by the new generation of family members. Maria Teresa and Marta (Rafael and Angela's children) took over the business, injecting fresh ideas and modernizing it in light of the ever-changing face of the fashion industry. Amid the bustle of the studio that has been Novia d'Art's base of operations since the 60's, Maria Teresa and Marta spoke to us as they prepared to present their latest collection at Pasarela Gaudí Novias.

Dress making has been an integral part of the sisters' lives since childhood. Growing up in a family business meant that most Sundays and holidays were

spent at the studio, as their parents were always working. Maria Teresa, around eight years-old at the time, began copying her Aunt Carmen's designs on little scraps of paper and designing new parts of the dresses. "I was already thinking of what I'd like if I were a designer" says Maria Teresa. Marta continues the story by saying that "even after 15 years, our mum still keeps those pieces of paper!"

At 13 or 14, Maria Teresa stopped designing and became more interested in pattern-making and subsequently went to the Escuela Guerrero and later to the Institut Superior de Disseny (IDEP) to specialize in fashion and pattern-making. Marta, only a year older, never really thought of the family business as her future but just sort of "fell into it". Since she was always interested in languages and her father decided to expand into the foreign market, but only spoke Catalan, she became the company's first translator at the age of 16. After attending the first international fair the company had ever been to in Düsseldorf, soon she was accompanying her father to other fairs in the UK and across Europe.

Dedication to the family firm can be seen in an anecdote which the siblings explained to me. When they were about 13 or 14 years-old, there was a flood and everything got soaked: the rolls of fabric, the materials, the pat-

terns, and so on. "It was horrible... we were desperate to help the family so we both cracked open our piggy-banks and offered to contribute with what we had... between us we only had about 200 pesetas, but our mother still keeps it," Marta recalls. That special connection and love for the work is still evident today as they talk about their family business.

Despite the fact that the intimate atmosphere of a family business can tear families apart, both women claim that there are no negatives to working together. Inseparable at home and at work, they recall that once a competitor advised them to travel apart, because if something were to happen, such as a plane crash, at least there would still be one person to continue the business. "We enjoy traveling and selling our dresses together; it's our life and we wouldn't want to do it without the other," is their joint response.

Surrounded by a roomful of stunning wedding gowns, I ask them what inspires a designer's collections. "I'm inspired by many things: by current fashion and innovation, but keeping in mind that it must suit the person. Although puffy sleeves may be "in" one season, I would never suggest a dress to a bride if that style didn't suit her. It's essential to understand the bride's style: classical, romantic, femi-



Maria Teresa poses with some of the dresses in their Gràcia studio / MW

nine, elegant, modern... and above all the dress must fit the personality," explains Maria Teresa. She goes on to say that "designers don't start working at 8:00 and finish at 21:00... we get ideas constantly and sometimes everything just converges into a clear idea: the use of a specific type of fabric, a certain detail, an inspiration... it all comes together. And then you work on it, you get more ideas. Sometimes you even get ideas as you sleep."

It is a busy time of year for the sisters with Bridal Week fast approaching and Novia d'Art will be introducing new ideas for this year's show. Maria Teresa says there will be four different lines made out of chiffon/silk, garza/silk, and lace; some with lots of volume and movement and others without. However, she was quick to note that the Gaudí collection – with its exclusive onus on avant-garde styles and the latest trends – is only a small

part of a much larger selection of the dresses they sell.

On the business side of things, Marta talks about the future. "Starting to sell in the US is our current goal. We'd like to start as early as June and at the latest by September of 2007. Of course we want to continue consolidating our brand and subsequently expand our sales to Japan as well." As homage for its long standing services to bridal fashion, Novia d'Art is to receive an award. "Tijera de Plata", designed by the prestigious silversmith "Alegre", will be presented on June 1. What makes the prize special for the Raich family is that the jury decision had been all but unanimous. In fact, if it is the family element that has been the secret of success, will Novia d'Art be continued by the coming generation? Both women have children with an interest in fashion. "It looks like it" says Maria Teresa.