



Eleanor Lambert

The formidable publicist who put New York on the fashion map

Words AMY BRADFORD

Considering what **Eleanor Lambert (1903-2003)** did to champion American fashion, she should be as famous as Calvin Klein. But the motto of this brilliant publicist, who transformed New York into an international fashion capital almost single-handedly, was 'I am not the news.' Lambert represented everyone who was anyone on the US cultural scene from the 1930s onwards, including Halston, Bloomingdale's and the Whitney Museum of American Art. She invented the idea of seasonal catwalk shows, founded the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Council of Fashion Designers of America, and imported the Best Dressed List from Paris, making it her own. **What makes her an icon?** Before Lambert came along, American designers were little more than anonymous hirelings for big manufacturers. She saw the praise

heaped upon European names such as Christian Dior and realised that her nation's creativity should be similarly rewarded. By the 1950s, thanks to a determined publicity campaign and her self-published Best Dressed List, she had put designers such as Claire McCardell and Charles James on the map.

'I am proud that I helped bring American style to the world's attention'

Lambert represented artists and interior designers alongside her fashion clients. One of her early scoops was sculptor Isamu Noguchi. His bust of her adorned the hallway of her 13-room apartment overlooking Central Park, which she shared with her publishing magnate husband Seymour

Berkson. Her living room walls were clad in red wool from Venice, and her neoclassical bedroom doubled as a command post, with a telephone and stacks of magazines next to her antique French bed.

Lambert worked at a Louis XV gilt desk and travelled, swathed in a leopardskin throw, by chauffeur-driven Jaguar. Most glamorous of all, her handbag even had its own personal assistant. 'The Bag' was chaperoned from office to home as its owner required.

Christened 'the Mother Teresa of fashion' by Donna Karan, Lambert kept working until she reached 100 and remained a fashionista to the end, dying just two weeks after putting in an order at Geoffrey Beene – one of the many designers she'd helped launch.

To find out more read *Eleanor Lambert: Still Here* by John A Tiffany (Pointed Leaf Press, £60).