

Zeitschrift: Textiles suisses [Édition multilingue]
Herausgeber: Textilverband Schweiz
Band: - (1969)
Heft: 2

Artikel: Swiss couturier in Rome : Heinz W. Riva
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-796586>

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Download PDF: 26.12.2025

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Swiss
Couturier
in
Rome



HEINZ W. RIVA



► HEINZ RIVA, ROME

Gala evening-gown in cotton organdy with applications of fans in organdy by FORSTER WILLI & CO., ST-GALL

◄ HEINZ RIVA, ROME

Evening pantsuit in printed silk organdy with applications of embroidered flowers by FISBA DE SAINT-GALL

Piazza di Spagna: a fashionable address. The brass name plates at the entrance to the Palazzo at No. 86 include one marked Heinz W. Riva, couturier.

A successful new recruit to Italian couture, a member of the 'Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana' since 1968, this young 'Italian' designer is in fact entirely Swiss!

Born in Zurich on March 16th, 1936, he went to school and completed his studies in Switzerland. It is not only a gift for couture but also a talent for drawing that he has in his blood, his father being a technical draughtsman, while his mother went in for couture and divided her time between Zurich and Paris. It was a revelation, the birth of a life-long passion for Heinz Riva when, at the early age of thirteen, he was taken by his mother to his first haute-couture collection, at Balenciaga's.

From then on he was for ever sketching designs for couture creations, and after a course at the Paul Brunn Modeschule in Zurich, Heinz Riva attended the famous Ecole de la Chambre syndicale de la Couture parisienne in Paris, which Yves St. Laurent had attended a few years before. After this, he stayed on in Paris for a while working first of all for Raphael and then – naturally – for Balenciaga. On his return to Switzerland, he joined Willi Meyer in Zurich. Shortly afterwards, England having suddenly become the trend-setter for avant-garde fashions, he decided to go to London, where he spent almost three years in couture circles.

After the grey skies and fogs of London, he realized that to create according to his temperament, he needed a more luminous, sunnier atmosphere. In Rome, where he designed for Galitzine – a Russian Princess turned couturière – he made a name for himself right away by producing young, very smart and at the same time very feminine collections. Three years later, when he was the up-and-coming young man of Roman couture, popular with the trade press, he decided to open his own house in the heart of Rome, overlooking the most famous steps in the world: the Trinità dei Monti. From that moment on – his first collection was presented two and a half years ago, between one official collection and the next – he met with dazzling success, owing to the style, the careful cut, the youthful, beautifully proportioned and graceful line of his creations. From that day on, in his elegant salon whose modern décor is softened by coffered ceilings matching the view of sixteenth-century Rome seen from his window and terrace, his clientele grew – a select clientele, mainly composed of young professional women, the wives of diplomats, young members of the international jet-set wintering in Italy, and above all famous exponents of classical music. Among his best-known clients, we must mention Joan Sutherland, for whom he has created the most wonderful concert wardrobes. She soon became a close friend of the family, and the young couturier is always her guest on his visits to New York. Other famous clients include glittering names of the screen: Carrol Baker, Pierangeli, etc.

Some of his ideas have really 'made' the fashion, as for example the giant side buckles in his 1968/69 winter collection, which were copied everywhere. At present, still believing in the future of miniskirts, he offers them in an almost geometric style, his latest creations fitting in fact more or less into a vertical rectangle with rounded corners.

His skilfully planned 'unfussy' feminine silhouette has also inevitably led him to design top ready-to-wear collections, made up for him by a Turin firm and presented twice a year in Florence.

Heinz Riva can never have enough sun and blue sky: he spends his summer holidays on the shores of the Mediterranean, preferably in Greece. But in winter, he seeks the blue sky he loves so much in the Swiss Alps, where he never fails to return in the month of February.

From the very start, he has never failed to include in his collections the key-products of the Swiss textile industry: the plain silks of Zurich, the prints whose designs he always suggests himself according to the leitmotiv of his collection, and – of course – the embroideries of St. Gall. It was Heinz Riva who, two years ago, offered 'gossamer' guipure for the first time and the highlight of his latest collection is an ethereal creation – a pink mist of cut-out embroidery, worn with printed Swiss organza harem pants, in a soft shade of pink, with floral guipure applications.

With a truly Swiss appreciation, Heinz Riva loves the embroideries created in Eastern Switzerland. And he plans to strengthen still further the contacts he maintains there so as to include more and more of these fabulous creations in his collections.

JOLE ROTA

