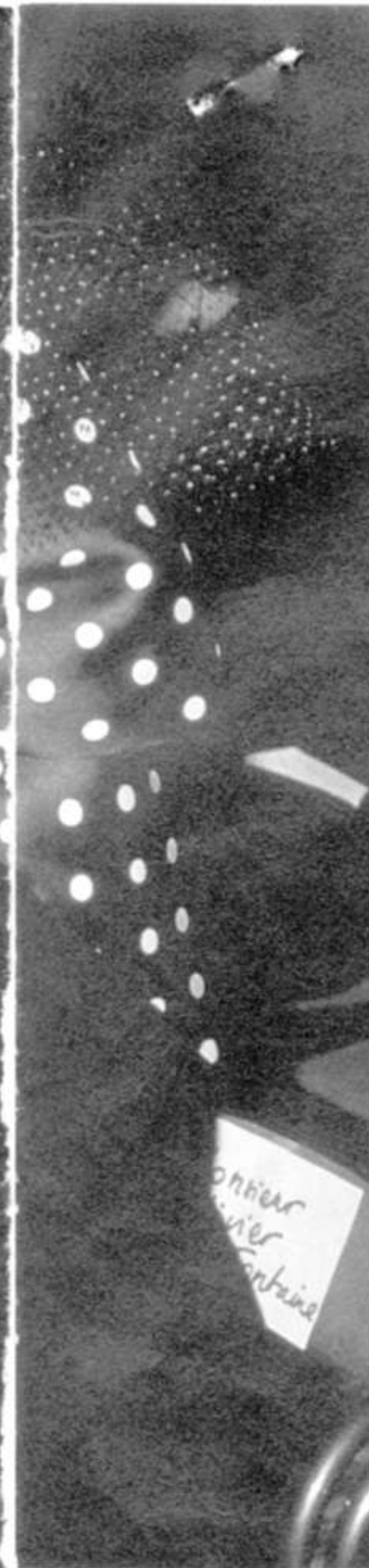


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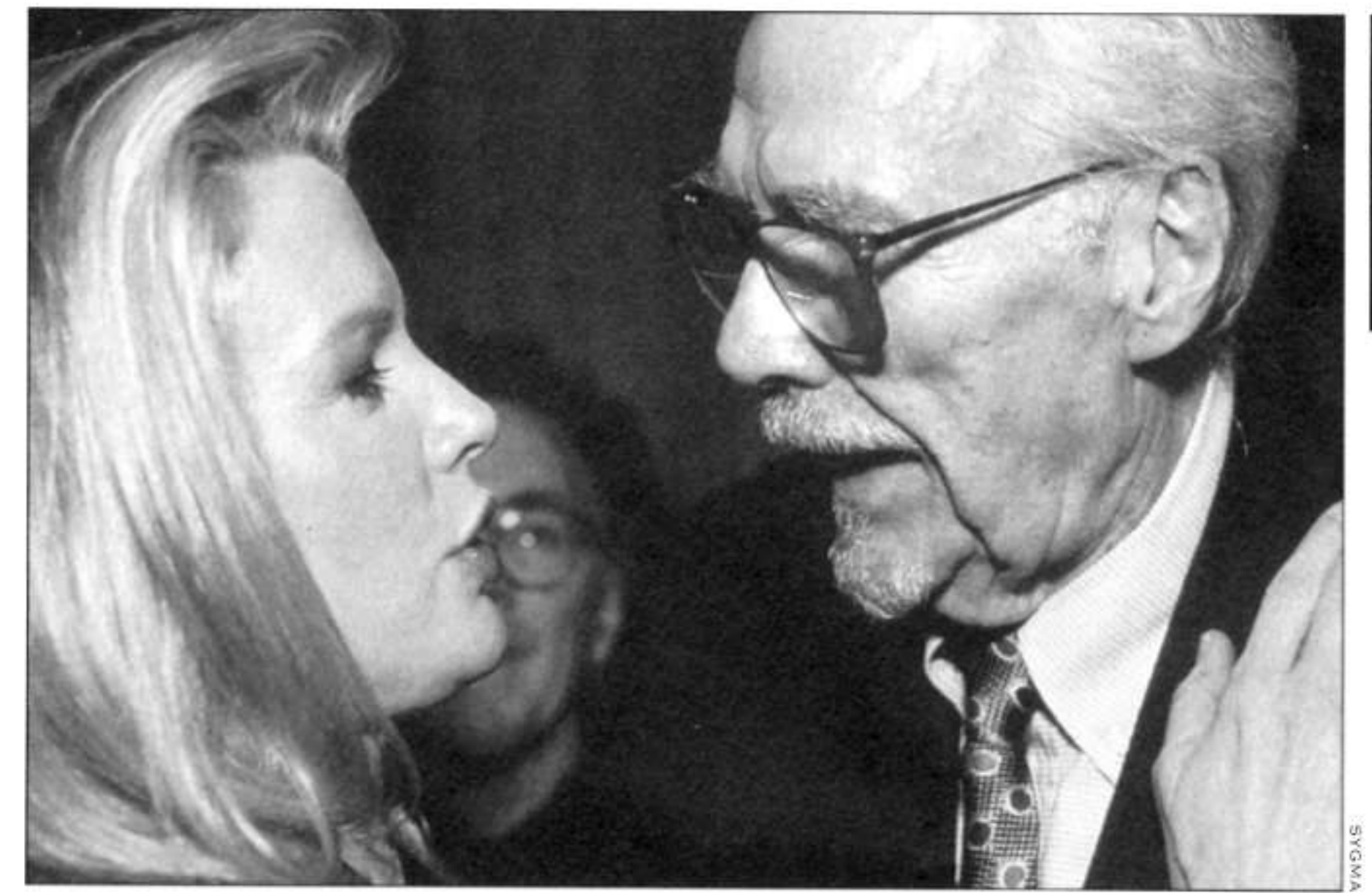
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➤ "These people are basically artists," Altman (with Kim Basinger) says of the designers.

▼ Taking in the Issey Miyake show were (from left) stars-turned-faux fashion mavens Lauren Bacall, Sally Kellerman, Tracey Ullman, Linda Hunt, Basinger and (in back) Rupert Everett, Lyle Lovett and Stephen Rea (in shades).



UP FRONT

# PARIS A LA ALTMAN

Through his lens, slyly, the director focuses on the world of high fashion

**H**IS USE OF REDS AND GREENS IS JUST *fa-bu-lous*," gushed Lauren Bacall, looking pretty fab herself at Christian Lacroix's recent ready-to-wear fashion show in Paris. "*Fantastique!*" purred Sophia Loren, decked out in Dior with a dotted pussycat bow. And there was Kim Basinger, suited up in an iridescent Lacroix and gabbing about "*Mee-lahn*," while Lyle Lovett (*sans* Julia, who arrived later by Concorde) in Comme des Garçons duds, took a perch near the runway.

*Mon Dieu*, Lyle Lovett at a French

fashion show? Relax, darling, it's only a movie. While famous faces are no novelty at the annual designer collections, this season had the added star power of a glittering cast provided by maverick director Robert Altman (*The Player*, *Nashville*), 69. He and his celebrity flock came to shoot the actual shows as backdrop for his new film, *Prêt-à-Porter* (French for ready-to-wear), in which he mixes actors with actual fashion personalities. Insiders have already taken to calling the comic mystery "Fashville."

The real blurred with the surreal as the film's stars—Tracey Ullman, Sally Kellerman, Danny Aiello and Cher among them—rubbed coutured shoulders for the cameras with real-life fashion editors, supermodels and designers. Not everyone was pleased. *Vogue*'s ultrachic editor, Anna Wintour, covering the shows for her magazine, looked aghast when Kellerman, cast as the editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, applauded while models paraded down the catwalk. "You just don't do that!" clucked *USA Today*'s Elizabeth Snead. "She

▲ Swathed in black Dior, Sophia Loren stars in her first American film since *Brass Target* in 1978.



was behaving outrageously." When Danny Aiello, as an abrasive American buyer, was directed to nod off on his neighbor's shoulder during Issey Miyake's show, the woman, unaware he was only acting, reacted with genuine horror. And, after an ad-libbed on-camera exchange with Kim Basinger, as an effusive TV fashion reporter, CNN's style watcher Elsa Klensch, playing herself, drawled, "She doesn't know anything. She's never even heard of deconstructionists!"

The Paris fashion scene piqued Alt-

man's interest 10 years ago when his wife, Kathryn, dragged him to Sonia Rykiel's show. "He sat in the audience bored," recalls Rykiel. "But when it began, he was captivated. For him, fashion suddenly wasn't just dresses, but theater." Now an Altman pal, Rykiel used her considerable influence to help open doors for the director at the houses of Dior, Lacroix and Issey Miyake.

But as the first week of filming wore on, fashion's *beau monde* began to wonder whether the great *auteur* was there to salute or to skewer.

After all, Loren's hat was the size of a satellite, and Bacall—playing a fashion *grande dame* who just happens to be color-blind—kept showing up in mismatched shoes. "If Picasso came to me and said, 'I'd like to paint you,' I wouldn't ask him, 'How?'" says Rykiel, defending the director. "Altman is an artist, and he'll do what he does."

Valentino snubbed the whole affair ("There is no need for a satirical movie on the fashion industry," he sniffed), and Chanel designer Karl Lagerfeld declared from his





SYGMA



LASZLOVERES

◀ Off-camera, Lovett and his *chérie*, Julia Roberts, hit the Champs-Élysées.

▲ "I don't usually do this," said Cher (right, with Basinger) of her cameo.

niche on Olympus, "Chanel makes its own cinema." Still, 400 guests, including Claudia Schiffer and her magician spouse-to-be, David Copperfield, jostled to be caught on-camera at a Bulgari bash where one model, mistaking Lovett for a waiter, asked him for a glass of wine. (The invitations specified that guests address the actors by their characters' names or, if in doubt, "Simply call them 'Darling.'")

By week's end, at least one fashion darling seemed totally swept up in the spirit. "Yesss, yesss, Altman," exclaimed *outré* designer Jean Paul Gaultier. "Massacre us, ridicule us, it feels so good!"

■ J.D. PODOLSKY

■ CATHY NOLAN in Paris