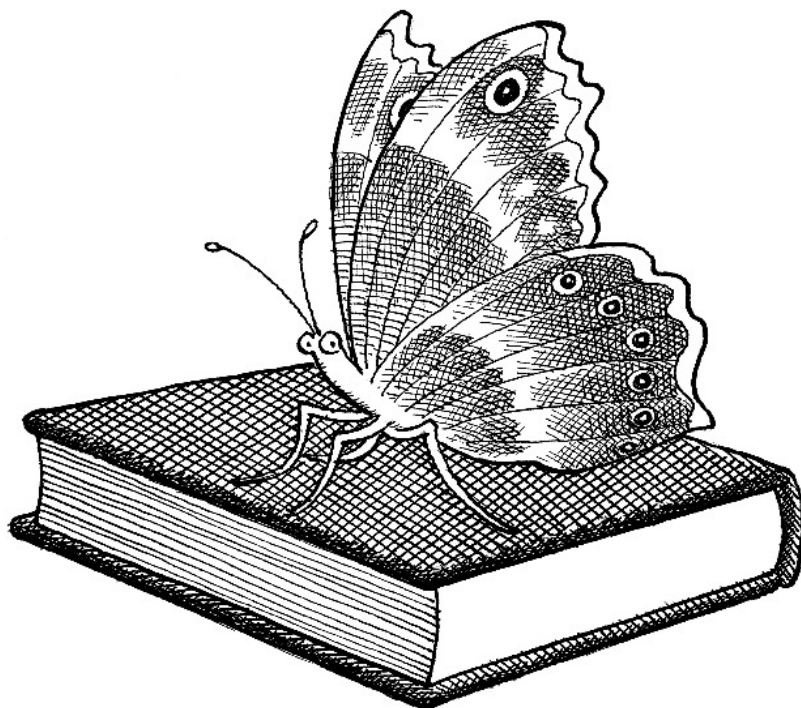


DIOR AND HIS  
DECORATORS

**Maureen Footer**

Victor Grandpierre,  
Georges Geffroy, and  
the New Look  
272pp. Vendome. £40  
(US \$60).



## Marzipan

MEG HONIGMANN

To what extent do interiors and fashion nurture and inform each other? The design historian Maureen Footer explores this question through the collaborations of Christian Dior and two lesser-known, but arguably equally talented, contemporaries, Victor Grandpierre and Georges Geffroy. Although in Dior’s own autobiography Geffroy and Grandpierre merit only three and four mentions respectively, their influence within these pages is pervasive.

Dior began his career as a gallerist, Grandpierre as a fashion photographer and journalist, Geffroy as a couturier. These disciplines flowered at different points in their careers and their shared background in theatre was never far from the surface. “Lessons learned in one medium”, writes Footer, “are ultimately, but not immediately, translated into another”. She depicts Dior’s milieu as idiosyncratic, if not hermetic: the people courted “no approval except their own, answering only to the dictates of style”; the parties were pure “fantasy”, but the mood was “as clear, linear and rational as a theorem by Descartes”. And, just as “a good couturier understands that a beautiful gown comes alive only when worn”, so “the success of a room depends on the human activity that unfolds within its walls”.

While the book charts the evolution of Dior and his interiors, one of the most interesting strands is Grandpierre's influence on Dior the brand. It was Grandpierre's early choice of Trianon Grey and white as Dior's "consistent visual messaging" that solidified Dior as a "brand before brand existed". For Grandpierre, grey was a "stormy sky" or "the interaction of shadow and light". It was so effective that the formula had to be kept a closely-guarded secret. The book itself is awash with Trianon Grey, its illustrations seamed with the houndstooth Grandpierre suggested for Dior's perfumes.

The two decorators are framed as each other's foils: Geffroy a "man of contradictions"; Grandpierre "more scholar than snob". They disliked each other; when Dior employed them to decorate his house they were confined to different realms. Geffroy, with little-to-no training apart from an "eye", was set to work on the public spaces and entertaining rooms (in his own apartment his bedroom was "a monastic afterthought"), Grandpierre to the private chambers. After all, "though the house was most certainly about style, it was even more adamantly – and radically – about the individual". That included its interior designers: their ebullient personalities often push the unassuming Dior, "famously resembling a bland country curate made of marzipan", into the background.

Dior and his Decorators allows us to see the reciprocal links that were forged between couture and interior design in a Paris threaded through with opportunities for creative talent. The sumptuous illustrations throughout emphasize the parallels between fashion and interiors, but it is the generous detail and punctilious research that make Footer's book worth not just reading but re-reading.