

Style & Beauty

Fashion Week Pays Tribute to Style Maven Marilyn Riseman

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Boston Fashion Week pays tribute to socialite and style maven Marilyn Riseman.



The doyenne of Boston fashion, Marilyn Riseman embraced a style all her own—and encouraged others to do the same.

There's an art to shoulder-rubbing. Marilyn Riseman learned that as a girl back in the 1940s, when Tinseltown launched cherished silver-screen sirens and debonair gents. Here in Beantown, Harry "Doc" Sagansky, an infamous bookmaker and nightclub owner, created a similarly intoxicating world of who's who. But as alluring as her father's career could be, Riseman's true calling was inspired by her mother's sense of style—full of drama and all her own. Riseman would open her boutique, Apogee, on Newbury Street, stocking the shelves with edgy Parisian pieces, and start an event planning business.

But it was her Kabuki-style makeup, black Louise Brooks bob, and R-rated honesty that would ultimately define this socialite. Riseman understood the force of fashion and expressed herself masterfully, whether through a vintage cassette-shaped Chanel clutch or a pop of red accenting a black and white Yohji Yamamoto ensemble. The grande dame prided herself on bridging the gap between blue-blooded Brahmins and club kids. Both appreciated her no-nonsense grace and wicked sense of humor.

"She gave people permission to embrace their own styles and not [be afraid] of being different," says granddaughter Joanna Prager Johnsen. "She helped cultivate aspiring designers by treating them with respect. She believed if you treated them like big boys, that's what they'd become." Longtime friend Jay Calderin, founder and executive director of Boston Fashion Week, recalls that "to have Marilyn in your front row was like being anointed." She attended at least one BFW event—perched in the front row, of course—each year until she passed away at age 86 on March 4.

Boston Fashion Week's 20th anniversary this year is dedicated to her legacy. As a tribute to Riseman's lifetime commitment to the art of fashion and her tireless support of Boston's creative community, the designers are keeping a front-row seat open in her honor. Her presence and spirit will always be felt.

October 5–11
PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF MARILYN RISEMAN

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