difference between a mediocre designer and a good designer."

In their studio is the evidence that had editors jolting to attention at their show: the clashing contrasts of color-blocked orange, magenta, electric blue, coral, and lime cut into jackets, T-shirts, and shorts; the eye-vibrating multicolored micro-florals and polka dots; the long, vertically pleated silk skirts, slashed to fly away in movement. There are Ungaro draped moments in there, as well as flashes of vintage Ken Scott in the mini-flowers, all part of the great Italian backstory Aquilano.Rimondi loves.

Ask about the provenance of that YSL skirt silhouette—an arrangement of knife pleats that also captivated Pilotto and McCartney—and the dynamics of their double act kick into gear. "It's a dress from the seventies, orange and green, with prints. With a jewelry belt. *Molto bello!*" says Rimondi, adding, with a jerk of the thumb at Aquilano, "He wanted to do splits!" Aquilano shrugs. "And he wanted to do two centimeters. Only! So I just took the seams and ripped!"

That jokey complicity over the push-and-shove between creativity and pragmatism has helped the pair persevere through multiple corporate complications to reach the point where they're finally finding their own voice. Aquilano, couture-trained in Rome, and Rimondi, originally a pattern cutter, met while working at Max Mara, but after nine years they branched out, emerging as winners of the *Vogue Italia* Who Is On Next young-designer prize in 2005. Hired by Malo for three years, they left to take over the creative direction of Gianfranco Ferré's womenswear in 2008. Meanwhile, they'd started showing in Milan under the label 6267. When the crash happened, their relationship with 6267 ceased, and then another misfortune hit: Although they're still working for Ferré, the post became less of a golden opportunity when its parent company ran into financial trouble. As far as they're concerned, their happiest decision has been to go it alone. A self-financed label, they are a rarity in the Italian system, but one whose energy is making a great contribution. As Aquilano puts it, "What we want to do is remodernize the idea of Italian fashion." □

SCENE STEALER

Author Camilla Morton lifts a page from designers' lives for a series of fashion fairy tales.





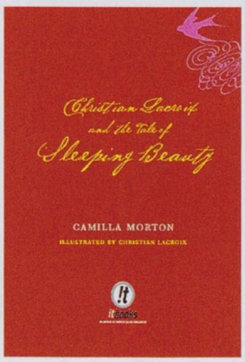
If Camilla Morton is to be believed, you're never too old for fairy tales. "I love the escapism," says the fashion writer, "along with the hidden motto 'Follow your dreams.' " That explains why Morton asked her designer friends to collaborate on reimagining four traditional myths with their fantastical lives woven in. "After all," she continues, "a dry biography would kill their magic."

First to undergo the once-upon-a-time treatment is Christian Lacroix. In his *Sleeping Beauty,* the flamboyant *créateur* who brought *plénitude* and "le pouf" to eighties closets heroically awakens a princess under a bitter fashion editor's curse by placing his Dé d'Or over her pricked finger and turning the sackcloth-wearing residents of Far Far Away into opulent dressers. "I always enter fantasy when I work," says the designer, who illustrated the part-autobiographical story with elaborate digital collages. "Sometimes fiction is better than real life!"

"They're intended for the child in everyone," says Morton, whose first tale hits shelves this month. The second, her interpretation of *The Elves and the Shoemaker,* with Manolo Blahnik, is scheduled for fall. Your prince will come this Valentine's Day, even if only in literary form.

—ESTHER ADAMS *view >140*





CHIC VOLUME
FROM TOP: CHRISTIAN LACROIX'S ILLUSTRATIONS FOR *SLEEPING BEAUTY* (HARPERCOLLINS, $15; AMAZON.COM); THE BOOK'S COVER.

CHRISTIAN LACROIX/Courtesy of HarperCollins