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The
Story
of

BIBA

by



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BIBA - THE STORY

PART ONE. PALESTINE

Barbara Hulanicki, the daughter of a polish olympic athlete and diplomat, Witold Hulanicki, was born in Warsaw in December 1936.

She had two younger sisters, Beatrice and Biba, of whom she was very fond. Her childhood was spent mainly in Palestine in Jerusalem during the war years and for her it was a happy and secure period, until she was 12 years old. One day in February 1948, her father hastily left the family home, never to return. He had been assassinated, and Barbara went through a delayed shock. The only stable security the family had left was in the form of her aunt Sophie, a rich domineering woman, with beauty, self assurance and poise. Barbara was later to realise how much of a source of inspiration her aunt would be to her in the coming years. Aunt Sophie, was Barbara's mother's elder step-sister, and for years had monopolized Barbara's mother - so much that she was feared and respected.

A few days after the news of Witold Hulanicki's assassination his body was found with another by Palestine police, rotting in a heap. After burying their father on the Mount of Olives, the remaining Hulanicki's left for England the following week. It was a turbulent journey, and a dangerous one, but miraculously they finally landed at Croydon Airport in February, 1948. They first stayed with friends of the late Witold Hulanicki in Brixton, until her aunt had found them through the Polish grapevine. It was Barbara's first meeting with her 'wicked' auntie, but on meeting her she was filled with admiration and liked her on the spot. Auntie soon whisked the family away to her own quarters at the Ritz Hotel, where she had been living since her husband's death, in 1943. It was he who had left Aunt Sophie her entire fortune. Later, under her supervision,

the Hulanickis moved into service apartments in Chesham Place near Belgrave Square. The children were provided with Miss Smith, their governess and child-minder, who was instructed to teach them English and show them London. Barbara found these times rather nightmarish, her English was 'nt as good as she had previously believed and her Aunt was continually chiding her for it. So inevitably, she withdrew into her shell, and the meetings with her Aunt became more frightening. Every week there was Sunday lunch with Auntie. It was, to Barbara, the 'dreaded Ritual'.

One day, Aunt Sophie ordered that they should all move to Brighton. The Hulanicki's were to stay at the Clarges Hotel at the Brighton Rock end of the seafront and Aunt Sophie moved into a suite on the first floor of the Metropole Hotel. Soon after, Aunt Sophie decided that the Hulanicki's should move again -- as their hotel was unsuitable for young children. So a large flat was found in a converted Victorian mansion facing Preston Park. Barbara felt that now they could be free of their Aunt's domineering ways - but not so. She haunted them like a phantom and their new quarters took on a sense of gloom. The only thing that kept Barbara's spirits up was the thought of going to school. Barbara and Beatrice were to attend a local convent as boarders. After a few weeks, Barbara settled in very well, she found great interest in the cinema, and her first heroine was Esther Williams. This period of her life was very much dominated by Auntie. Everything Barbara was instructed to do turned out wrong. She became gauche and shy and to make matters worse, she was told she was growing too fast. At fourteen her feet were a size seven!

At an early age, Barbara had always been fastidious about clothes. She never wanted to be dressed the same as her sisters, she wanted to be different. Before Aunt Sophie appeared on the scene,

Barbara's preferences were always considered but not now. She recalls in her autobiography how she was made to wear her Aunties' old sable coat that reached down to her ankles, and was also handed a crocodile handbag to carry sandwiches for herself and her sister's visit to the ice-rink. Amongst other things, she could never win her Aunt's approval, no matter what she did or how she tried. The relationship between her mother and Aunt Sophie was also deteriorating with each passing Sunday.

When Barbara was fourteen, she was told that she was going to a real boarding school on the outskirts of Worthing - all expenses paid by Aunt Sophie. Charmandean School was privately owned and expensive. However, Barbara was thrilled and fell in love with the place. It was an escape from Aunt Sophie, but she still loomed under her shadow, well into the end of her schooldays. In 1955, when Barbara was just eighteen, she left school, and her Aunt was to decide her career. First, it was to be an Opera singer, but Barbara could nt sing. So Aunt Sophie decided that both Barbara and Beatrice should paint instead. They were to attend Art lessons in Brighton. This idea terrified Barbara as she was afraid to draw nudes - but her Aunt quickly realised her fear and **reassured** her that a nude was nt really a nude when it was for art's sake.

Barbara soon realised how much she enjoyed drawing and she loved clothes - so she felt she should become a dress designer. Aunt Sophie, however felt that Barbara should go to University and not to mingle with long haired louts with dirty nails ! So it was decided that Barbara should go to Nice for four months to learn some rench. At least now she would have some of the independence she was fighting for, but she still had her heart set on going to art school.

Those four months in Nice were magical for Barbara. She was

very much influenced by her fellow students and envied their style and elegance. She also fell in love for the first time, but it was not reciprocated. When it was time for her to leave her french had not improved at all, and her fifty pounds spending money had dwindled away. For this, she was severely reprimanded by her Aunt, who also accused her of looking like a tart and behaving like one.

Eventually, Aunt Sophie's temper cooled and despite her unease at Barbara's attending art school, she finally gave in and Barbara enrolled at Brighton Art School in the middle of a course. Her tutor almost immediately labelled her as "another fashion one", in a life drawing class. Barbara realised this herself, and soon after, she joined the fashion class with the higher National Diploma students. Her new tutor was Joanna Brogden who was a visiting lecturer from the Royal College of Art in London. The fashion class worked very hard for her and Barbara was no exception. She vied with her colleagues for praise which was never forthcoming, but nevertheless she still looked forward to her classes every week.

As Barbara was not a grant student, Aunt Sophie paid her fees each term, which meant she still had a firm reign over Barbara's movements. Socialising was restricted to 10.30 pm on Saturday nights - thus restricting her personal relationships !



FIG. 1a.

Barbara with
husband Fitz and
their son, Witold.



FIG. 2a.

AUNT SOPHIE.



FIG. 7b.

BARBARA'S WINNING OUTFIT IS ON THE LEFT.

PART TWO

If anyone ever had any claim for putting Barbara on the road to success it just had to be Aunt Sophie. In 1955, she had spotted a design competition that was being run by the Evening Standard. There were three categories, Beach Wear, Day wear, and Evening Wear. Of course it was Aunt Sophie who had intended to enter her own design and she summoned Barbara's drawing ability to put it down on paper. Barbara thought her Aunt's creation very strange, it was a day travel garment, consisting of a silk dress, over which there was a linen wraparound skirt with matching linen jacket. The idea was to travel in the suit, which later peeled off to reveal the silk dress for the evening. This was posted off, and the next day Barbara decided to enter the beachwear section. She did a drawing of a girl who was the image of her screen heroine at the time, Audrey Hepburn in "Sabrina Fair". She was wearing a halter neck beach suit with little shorts then Barbara added large hoop earrings and a pair of ballet pumps to her finished entry which she promptly posted off. One day on her return from college, her mother greeted her with the news that she had won the Evening Standard competition in the beach wear section, out of three thousand entrants ! Barbara was so excited, she immediately telephoned her Aunt to relay the good news. At first Aunt Sophie believed her own design had won, until Barbara meekly confessed on having sent her own entry.

When Aunt Sophie had fully regained her composure, she started organizing Barbara's trip to London to collect her prize which was to have her beach outfit made to measure at Hartnell's. The finished outfit was made up in stiff striped taffeta, much to Barbara's annoyance (Fig. 1b.). She had wanted polished cotton, but that seemed to be a taboo in couture establishments.

In Barbara's second year at art school, she sat for her inter-

mediate exams. She was studying fashion, but found pattern cutting tedious - she had just about managed to cut a pattern for a shift dress that consisted of two pockets, two darts and two side seams. Miraculously she passed, to everyone's astonishment for it was such a simple dress. Barbara now had to make a decision about choosing a subject for the next two years. It was either dress design or fine art. The thought of two more years painting or sewing she could'nt face, so she called it a day without consulting her Aunt or her mother. She promptly wrote a cheeky letter to a London Studio thar specialized in fashion illustration. To her surprise, Helen Jardine Artists ? replied and called for for an interview. On the strength of her portfolio full of Audrey Hepburn drawings, she was given a job ! They installed her as a trainee artist, and gave her other odd jobs to do. In between times, she could practise her fashion drawing. She would earn £ 5 a week, plus a £3 a week allowance she would receive from her Aunt. Barbara felt elated and almost independent, but more importantly, she had one foot in London.!

In her last year at art school, she became engaged to a naval officer whom she met through a friend. Excited and happy, she plunged into her career with great energy and enthusiam. Her drawings were improving all the time as she completely emerged herself into fashion drawing. She had abandoned the idea of becoming a designer as it was too difficult - she just would'nt have been able to sustain interest. Besides, with drawing she could see instant results. She particularly liked drawing faces, and she spent a great deal of time practicing a certain style. Four O'Clock in the afternoon was Barbara's best time for drawing as she felt more relaxed. Then she would have to struggle with drawing the hands and bodies of her 'faces' which she found most tedious. Perhaps the worst part of her job, she felt, was having to draw the actual clothes on her figures. The garments that were sent to the studio to be illustrated were, to Barbara's

mind, "Horrendous". They were badly cut and shaped, and she found it very frustrating having to make the clothes appear as "nice as possible". The french, she thought, were the only people who knew how to cut clothes well. Even to find a decent dress for herself around town was frustrating. She would find a rare simple black dress in Wallis, designed by Sheila Camera. Barbara admired her creations, she could pick them out they were so simple. She also had found a black wool dress with transparent chiffon sleeves designed by Jean Muir, another designer she admired. Sadly clothes like these were few and far between.

From advertising, Barbara progressed into editorial work, it didn't pay as well, but it was important for her portfolio. She signed herself as Hulanicki, because it sounded more masculine, as it seemed that it was only men who reached the top. Then she moved on to illustrating for "Homes and Gardens" and "The Times", the "Daily Express" and "Womans Mirror". Her ambition then was to work for "Queen" whose layouts she admired. She also worked for a short period with "Vogue" drawing "Mrs Exeter", an imaginary lady. From this she progressed to "Womans Wear Daily". It was, for Barbara, the most interesting job of all. It was her job to cover social occasions, drawing society ladies in their ball gowns. She would also draw at secret previews of the Wedding gowns of the Duchess of Kent and Princess Alexandra at John Cavanagh. At the fashion collections she would be there, sketching designs to be sent to New York. On one occasion in Paris she saw her heroine Audrey Hepburn in the flesh when she was coming to Givenchy's to choose her wardrobe for a feature in Vogue. moderne
times

Barbara was freelance at this stage, and after each Paris trip, she felt she'd never be asked to do another assignment - but she never found herself in that situation, she always got some job to do. With all the work she was getting, she found herself

becoming financially independent in a very short time. That meant too, that she was able to do her own thing, much to her Aunt Sophie's annoyance. They weren't getting on. Barbara even managed to avoid those "tortured lunches" on Sunday by pretending to have more important things to do. In a short while, Barbara would soon be able to leave home and live in London, and buy a car. In between her working schedule, she would manage to meet her fiancée, Peter, on one of his rare trips home on leave. These meetings exhausted her emotionally, so much so, that she could not bear the thought of a life travelling around, with her home in a few suitcases. That decided her. She broke off the engagement. Her Aunt was livid, and told her that at twenty-one, she was getting too old to do such a thing! Her sister Beatrice had already married her first love, and went to live in Ghana.

In 1960, Aunt Sophie decided to go on a trip around the world. Barbara's mother was also persuaded to go along. Her life began again, on this voyage - she met Humphrey, whom she was later to marry. Aunt Sophie was not at all pleased about this. After the voyage, Humphrey contacted Barbara's mother, who soon whisked her away to London to marry him.

In 1960, Barbara was twenty-two, and to Aunt Sophie's mind "on the shelf". Barbara did not care. In her working studio she listened to all the tales of boisterous living of another girl, Susan. Barbara felt she could be part of it too, so she left home to share a flat with Jenny, her ex-fiancée's sister and other girls in Douro Place. They organized parties, and it was at one of these that she first saw Stephen Fitz-Simon, a man she had heard so much about. She was smitten by him at first sight. She felt he was the one for her. Unfortunately Fitz was quite intoxicated, and Barbara found her attentions monopolized by someone called David. He asked her to have lunch with him the

next day - then he proposed. She accepted. The following week she was involved in an accident with David. They were going to Brighton to meet her mother and Aunt - in David's new car. She awoke in a hospital bed, and was then informed that David had been taken to another hospital. He was unconscious and even two weeks later when Barbara was discharged, he was still in the same condition. She visited him regularly - against her Aunts wishes, who believed he would never come to. When he did, finally, he could'nt remember Barbara, and could only recognise his mother. Barbara was shattered. She had known him for so little time before the accident, he might never recall her at all. For eighteen months she visited his hospital bed, but things never improved. Emotionally spent, she still believed she could devote her life to looking after him - after all, she was earning enough for them both, had obtained a flat of her own and was completely independent. How long she could go on like this she did'nt know. Until finally, she realised it was futile. Things had'nt improved. Eighteen months after the accident she visited Beatrice in Ghana, became sick and hoped she would'nt ever recover. It was then she vowed never to see David again.

PART THREE

When Barbara returned to England she lived alone in Cromwell Road, and she met Stephen Fitz-Simon again. This time, because she was selling her flat and he wanted to buy it. He was getting married shortly. She felt envious of the other girl - but agreed to the transaction anyway. Barbara didn't see him again until Christmas, at a party, and his fiancée was with him. She knew that she was in love with him. They became re-acquainted again and got on very well together. A few weeks after, Fitz asked her to dinner, then soon after that, asked her to marry him. First, she said 'No' as she had plans to go to America, her big dream, but on leaving she had second thoughts - she wanted to go back to Fitz. They corresponded daily, while she was there, and on her return to England, he had got hold of a marriage licence. Barbara told her mother the good news, and she wanted her Aunt's approval, even though she had disowned her.

Barbara and Fitz married in November, 1961, in a side chapel of the Brompton Oratory. They honeymooned in St. Ives, as Barbara was tired of travelling and wanted to stay in England. Later they resumed their working lives - Fitz was an account executive in advertising and Barbara still had her drawing. Together their incomes were quite substantial and as Barbara had found new confidence and security in Fitz, she decided to leave the studio to go freelance. During that period, Barbara's and Fitz's working lives clashed with one another - so Barbara was anxious to find something they could work at together, where they would be more united. Then Fitz suggested she should design a garment and to sell it by post. It was a risky decision, but they went ahead with the idea. Joanne Brogden, with whom Barbara had kept in touch, found students to make up a sample of Barbara's creation. It was ~~an~~ expensive long evening skirt with a drawstring. Fitz then brought the sample to Jill Butterfield of the Daily Express

who was thrilled by the cheapness of it and agreed to feature the skirt.

Barbara and Fitz were terribly excited about their new venture. They had to put a name on it, so they went through hundreds, then decided to use Barbara's younger sisters' name, Biba. Biba postal boutique was born ! The next thing they had to do was get a logo. Barbara's friend, Moira McGregor, whom she met during the days at Helen Jardine, had a friend who was a graphic designer. Fitz and Barbara then approached John McConnell, and he designed a logo that looked like a post office rubber stamp. They then arranged a receiving postal address in Oxford Street. Everything was set.

The skirt was featured one Monday in June, 1963. It was a small picture, but the description of the skirt was apt and the address was there. With anticipation, the next day, Fitz and Barbara went to collect the mail. Alas, they had only received fifty replies containing 2 guinea postal orders. During the next four days, they had only totalled two hundred orders for the skirts. It was a terrible anti-climax. The dress department at the Royal College made them, then Barbara and Fitz despatched them from their flat in Cromwell Road. They had only made 6d profit on each skirt, enough to cover the daily petrol to Oxford St. There then followed another couple of children's garments, a child's denim dress featured in the Observer and another child's garment in the Evening Standard. This fell hopelessly flat too. They didn't receive one reply. It seemed that their new career had ended before it had begun. Twiddling their thumbs, they thought of taking a small advertisement on the back pages of newspapers. Together they invented the 'Wigechief', a cotton triangle scarf with a false fringe sewn at the front of it - it would cover rollers as one did their housework.



FIG. 2b.

BARBARA IN 1964, A FASHION ILLUSTRATOR.



FIG. 2c. THE DRESS THAT STARTED
IT ALL.

One day they were contacted by the Daily Mirror. Barbara was to see Felicity Green, the fashion editor, who was doing a feature on four career girls. She wanted Barbara to be one of them - she had noticed the Biba Postal Boutique, and asked Barbara to design and make up something for the feature. Barbara suggested a pink gingham dress with a hole in the back and a Brigitte Bardot Kerchief to match. This was agreed upon, but it had to be inexpensive. Finally, it was decided 25 shillings was adequate. Fitz, however, was furious with Barbara for agreeing to make it so cheaply. Ever since then, Fitz decided that he would make all the decisions where money was concerned - and Barbara was to concentrate on the designing.

The finished dress, when made up looked very good. It was sleeveless, had two darts and was quite short. The back of the dress had an enormous round hole in it. The gingham for the dress had been purchased in John Lewis, and Barbara believed there would be enough in supply in the event of large orders. The dress was promptly sent into the 'Mirror' and was dismissed from their thoughts. A few days later, Miss Green phoned Barbara to check whether she had a supply of pink gingham. Barbara and Fitz assured her that they had, but it turned out that the total supply of gingham was only 400 yards ! They weren't aware of this, however, and the following day the article with the dress was featured on the centrefold. A beautiful picture was shown of Pauline Stone, modelling the dress, and a similiar inset showed the back of the dress with the 'hole' detail. (Fig. 2c)



FIG. 3a. 1963.

A STRIPED POLO DRESS AND JERKIN BY
BARBARA IN THE BIBA MAIL ORDER
CATALOGUE .

BIBA

The next morning, on 5 May 1964, they went to Oxford Street in anticipation of mail. Fitz went to collect it. This time there was an avalanche ! Over the next few days they had totalled seventeen thousand letters, all containing 25s in postal orders. They were immediately deposited into the Midland Bank. They were over the moon, but quickly had to come back down to meet the orders ! It was now they discovered there was hardly enough gingham to meet ^a quarter of the order. What they needed was 25,000 metres! Eventually, they managed to procure the precious pink gingham from Rogers of Burgess Ledward, and a Greek manufacturer, Theo Savva, made up the dresses. When they had all been despatched, they attached a note with each parcel that said "You can now have a blue gingham dress". Then followed another five thousand orders. Out of the seventeen thousand dresses, only ninety were returned, but they had made a profit of 5s on each dress !

Other advertisements appeared on newspapers. The next was 'Womans Mirror'. It was a sketch of a brown pinstripe smock with the matching kerchief. It was priced at two guineas, then followed a mix and match printed cotton blazer, skirt and trousers, and a Winnie-the-Pooh hat and blouse featured by 'Honey' magazine. They were now fully launched into the Mail Order business. As orders became heavier, they realised the need to find a premises from which to despatch the clothes. This turned out to be a basement in Motcomb Street. As well as this they required help and employed a secretary and someone to do packing. Miraculously, until now, Fitz and Barbara managed to hold down their day jobs and still run a mail order business, but they were beginning to feel the effects. It was through the double page spread in 'Honey', that Barbara met Cathy McGowan, the then "Queen of the Mods". She was the heroine of the television programme, "Ready, Steady, Go". Barbara was thrilled when asked by Cathy to make clothes for her.





FIG. 3B.

THIS SILHOUETTE EXEMPLIFIES BARBARA'S
'IDEAL' FIGURE.

A POLKA-DOT BLOUSE AND SKIRT WITH
INVERTED PLEAT - FROM BIBA MAIL ORDER
CATALOGUE.

It was important for Barbara that the silhouette of her clothes was just right. Being heavy-boned herself, she had always wanted clothes with a skinny look. Clothes that were cut with armholes so high up the body, that the torso appeared long and skinny. Barbara found that the more deeply inset the shoulders were, complete with narrow sleeves made the silhouette more angular.

PART FOUR

Even during her busy schedule, Barbara found time to do what she loved most. Collecting junk. She would hunt antique shops picking up everything that looked interesting. It was on one of these hunting sprees that she spotted a little dilapidated corner premises on Abingdon Road in Kensington. It had once been a chemist's shop but there were black and gold signs in evidence and marvellous painted woodwork on the exterior. Barbara was hooked. She just had to have it. She brought Fitz to look at it, and he felt the same. Next, they had to find who owned it, and when they found Mr. O'Grady, the owner, he let them rent the premises for £ 20 a week. They spent weeks renovating the shop, and bought lots of ornaments and oddities to decorate the interior. One item was a beautiful Dutch wardrobe, for which they paid £ 40. Quite a lot of money.

They then approached Theo again, and asked him to make other dresses for them, in one style, but different fabrics. This was the famous smock with tight narrow sleeves. When the shop was almost completed, they had received two thousand orders by post for a chalkstripe brown smock with fluted sleeves and a matching kerchief. Fitz decided to store these dresses in the new premises as the basement in Motcomb Street was overflowing. To Barbara's astonishment, one morning, she had left the shop briefly for a few minutes, and when she returned, she found the shop packed with girls all trying on the chalkstripe smocks. Every dress was sold an hour later. Fitz delivered more in his car, and the transactions began outside the shop !

What Barbara and Fitz needed now was a Manageress, to control their little operation. They found a girl called Sarah Plunkett

who was just right for the position. However, after a couple of weeks, Sarah was exhausted. She needed help, so they found another couple of assistants, Irene and Elly, both blonde and beautiful sixteen year olds. Their's was now a fully-fledged shop, and the only one to stay open 'till 8 pm. Barbara and Fitz had now given up their jobs to become totally involved with Biba. To them, she was like a child that needed constant care and attention. They were anxious and afraid the first few days, in case their customers would'nt return, but they always did. They visited the shop like pilgrims! It soon became a well-known meeting place for 'Mod people', but unfortunately they also attracted the wrong kind of people too. There seemed to be an underground grapevine revolving around the shop, and a new feeling for style. Every girl could buy a new dress every day from Biba. The Biba smock, with tight narrow sleeves that restricted the circulation became the uniform for an era.

Amongst all the usual customers, Biba was visited by famous people, Julie Christie, Sonny and Cher, to name but a few. Barbara and Fitz felt highly honoured by their presence. Biba had other competitors too, Tuffin and Foale, and Top Gear, a shop Barbara was quite envious of. They always stocked beautiful french clothes. Despite all the competition, Biba enjoyed immense popularity. Barbara went on designing, and made a big breakthrough with the first fashion T-Shirt. She approached 'Admiral', a sportswear company, and asked them to elongate their classic rugby shirt. When this had been dyed in sludgy colours it became a dress. Then Barbara adapted a vest into a dress, it had high armholes and a narrow body with a drawstring neckline. These both turned out to be very successful.

On top of this, they dyed scarves, socks and hats in the dull

'auntie' colours that once Barbara had hated so much. Mulberries, blueberries, plums and rusts. Sometimes there were accidents with the dyes. The printer would forget to fix the colours, and they faded out, resulting in irate mothers returning the dresses demanding their money back. To most 'mothers', then, Biba represented the "Filthy Culture". Barbara's Aunt would have found this vulgar - they were no longer on speaking terms.

Over the following months, conditions were becoming more than a little cramped. They managed to rent another room upstairs and Barbara needed more assistance to help take care of Biba's growing contacts. While she made patterns and clothes for Cilla Black and Cathy McGowan. Biba even became the theme of a film which involved the life of a country girl, who on coming to the City is transformed into a "swinging sixties dolly". They had used Elly, one of the girls in Biba as the heroine.

Life with Biba was hectic and she was growing. They needed more room! So, Barbara and Fitz found a new premises in Kensington Church Street. It had been empty for a long period, but supermarket chains were competing for it. Despite this, they managed to get the lease for the shop. Barbara asked Julie Hodges, a designer who had created some lovely wallpaper for the shop in Abingdon Road, to create some for the new shop. The rest of the shop required no more designing. It was exactly what Barbara wanted. There were beautiful mahogany shelves and counters and all that was needed was to clean it. The floor was going to be of black and white check tiles - like the other shop. The only thing it lacked now was the name, and through Julie, Barbara got in contact with a fabric designer and painter Tony Little. He painted the word 'Biba' in gold on a black background, and on the windows he painted a gold leaf circle surrounded by black Art Nouveau squiggles. date

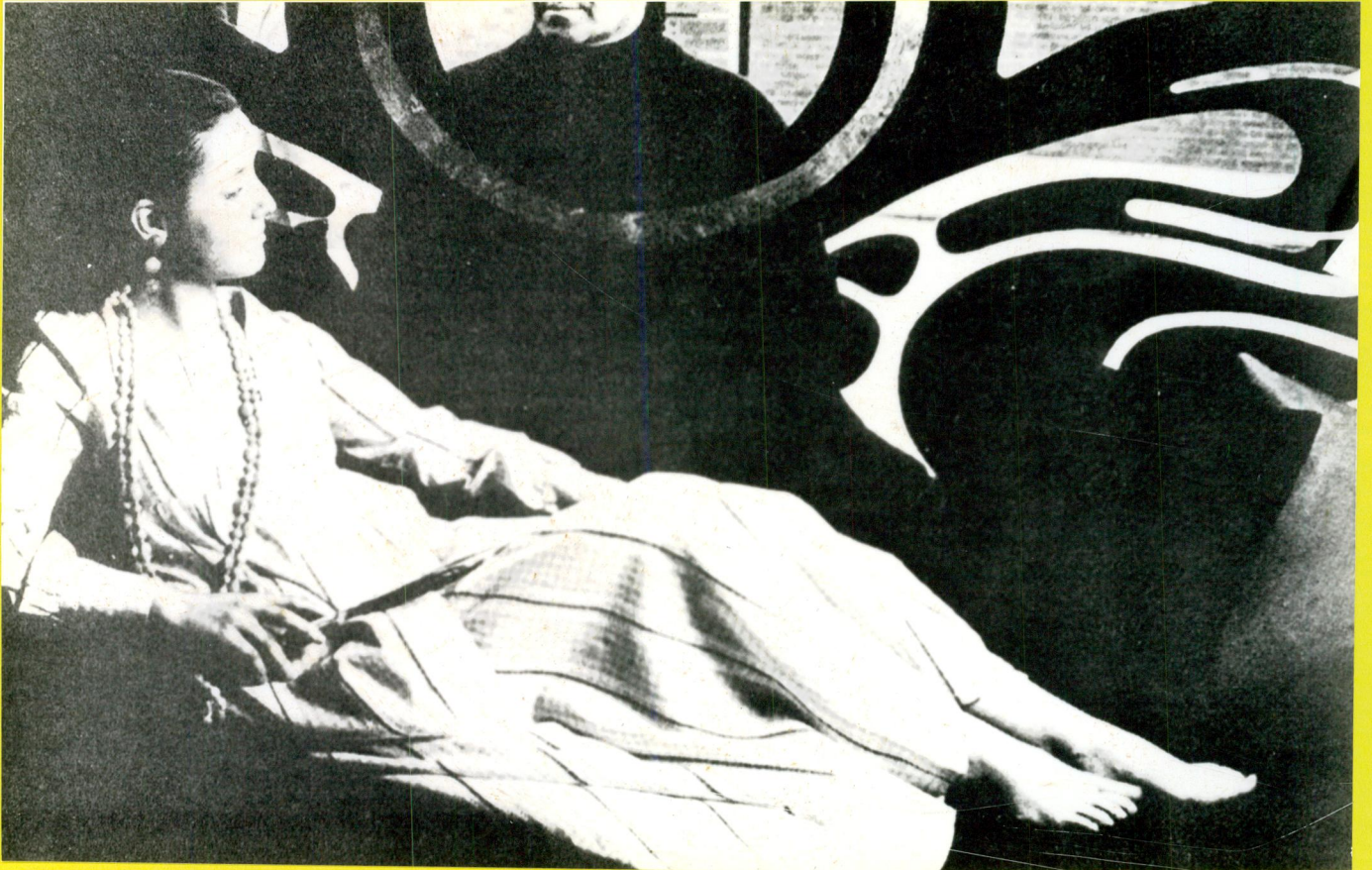


FIG. 3C.

INSIDE BIBA'S NEW BOUTIQUE 19-21 KENSINGTON CHURCH STREET.

THE MODEL WEARS A STRIPED COTTON COAT AND DRESS IN PALE PINKS.



FIG. 4a.

This was the Biba logo. To celebrate the move from Abingdon Road, to Church St., they organized a party, and arranged a photocall for the press. The clothes were railed down the street by the Biba girls the next day to the new shop, it was like a procession - with photographers following along! Barbara was not with them, she waited anxiously for the guests to arrive - then they all arrived at once, along with Cilla Black and Cathy McGowan who helped to unload the lorry. (FIG. 4a.) It was a hectic but exhilarating day, they had no time to relax. The following morning there was a queue outside the new shop.

Even though the new premises at Church Street was four times the size of Abingdon Road, it was always full of people. Two weeks after the opening in March 1966, Biba was visited by reporters from 'Time' magazine, then 'Paris Match' and 'Stern'. Things were really rolling now, the takings from the shop were doubling every week, and a host of celebrities visited Biba. There was the odd panic if they thought certain items in the shop would 'nt sell, but everything went, it was almost impossible to keep up with the demand. The 'minis' they were producing were getting shorter and shorter, so naturally tights and panties became more colourful.

In 1966, they also opened another shop in Brighton. However this proved to be nothing but trouble. They unknowingly hired a manageress who entertained half the underworld there. On top of that the stock was disappearing, and there was a certain assistant who had been doing a roaring trade selling drugs. Barbara was totally against drugs. The shop was closed after ten months. Even in Abingdon Road, they still had problems with thieves and break-ins, but they were dealt with in the correct fashion.

Towards the end of 1966 Barbara became pregnant. They then

decided to move out of their flat into a lovely house in Brunswick Gardens, quite near the shop on Abingdon Road. Work carried on as usual, and Barbara and Fitz were talked into opening a winter shop in a hotel in Zermatt. This proved to be quite successful. Later, in June 1971, Barbara gave birth to a baby boy. She wanted him to be called after her late father, so he was christened Witold Vincent Hułanicki Fitz-Simon.

After Witold's birth, Barbara found great interest in designing children's wear. As it happened, there was very little choice in the way of childrens and baby clothes - but Barbara was soon going to change all that. A childrens department was soon installed at the back of the shop, it resembled a doll's house, and went down a treat with Biba's young clientele. Everything seemed to turn out the way Barbara wanted it. She knew Biba would never have been, if it weren't for Fitz. He had the Midas touch.

The 'Biba' image grew and grew. The classic 'Biba' dolly was young and pretty, with a skinny body, long legs and tiny feet. She was also square-shouldered, with virtually no bust. Her face was a perfect oval shape and her eyes had heavy lids with long, spiky lashes. Barbara was pleased when she saw how people were influenced by 'her look'. That proved to her a personal measure of success - she did'nt care that the 'Glossy Press' paid them no attention. She wanted to appeal to 'real people', out on the street. Her reward was when she had a street winner.

Barbara and Fitz were still keeping on the mail order operation, but they needed to expand, so they had a new catalogue specially designed, along with a new logo, by John McConnell. Many more catalogues followed after the great success of the first, which was brought out in the summer of 1968. Mia Farrow's younger



FIG. 4b.

THE ENTRANCE TO 'BIG BIBA'
IN KENSINGTON HIGH STREET.

FIG. 4c.

THE NEW BIBA LOGO DESIGNED
BY JOHN MCCONNELL.

FIG. 5a. (LEFT).

BIBA VERSION OF COUNTRY TWEEDS → 1969.

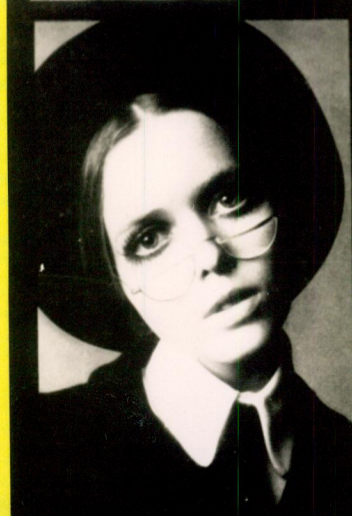


FIG. 5b. (LEFT, BELOW)

BIBA'S FAVOURITE MODEL, STEPHANIE FARROW
EXEMPLIFIES THE CHANGING BIBA FACE.

FIG. 5c. (BELOW)

BIBA'S 'NAUGHTY THIRTIES' LOOK. 1974.



sister modelled for one of them. The clothes in the catalogue were very reasonable, dresses were around £ 3, blouses were £ 2, and coats could be bought for around £ 8.

By now Barbara and Fitz had had to acquire a vast warehouse premises for the catalogue business. They also, for the first time, had to employ Managers, who employed assistant managers and so on. Sometimes they found it impossible to keep the operation running smoothly - there were so many people to consult. However, they had to finally phase out the Biba Mail Order, as the cost of keeping the administration was out of all proportion to the return.

This did not deter them, however. Biba was moving forward, not back. Barbara and Fitz spotted a new place they were eager to have. It was on Kensington High Street, and was nine times the size of the Church Street shop. The main attraction was the basement, with a beautiful open area of 5,000 square feet. In order to acquire enough finance for the move, Fitz had to approach Robin Napier, the director of the huge financial house of Charterhouse Japhet. He agreed to help provide finance along with Dennis Daly Ltd. and Dorothy Perkins. In return, Barbara and Fitz had to forfeit 75 per cent of Biba. Barbara and Fitz were left with the remainder. ^ ^

The new shop opened in September 1969, it was an instant success. More than one hundred thousand people visited Biba every week. The 'Sunday Times' even called it 'the most beautiful store in the world' ! It was also now that 'The Times' newspaper acknowledged Biba. The shop had now developed into all categories of clothing, from knickers and bras to jewellery and accessories, and of course the childrens department. Barbara also started the Biba cosmetic range, which was very successful. They celebrated



FIG. 6a.
 BIBA TROUSER SUITS
 FOR THE 'NEW
 TWEEDY PEOPLE',
 DESIGNED BY
 BARBARA HULANICKI.



FIG. 6b . (1969)
 A SKETCH OF BIBA'S WINNING OUTFIT, AND AN OUTFIT THAT APPEARED IN THE MAIL ORDER CATALOGUE.



FIG. 6c.

BARBARA ON THE ROOF GARDEN ABOVE 'BIG BIBA'.

by holding a press launch party, in April, 1970. Later, Biba also had a footwear department, with every shoe and boot designed by Barbara herself. Meanwhile, the cosmetic range was selling very well. It accounted for over 10 per cent of the total sales of the entire shop. Then later, they were asked to distribute their cosmetics through Fiorucci in Milan. Then St. Tropez and Japan. The negotiations for launching the cosmetics in Japan took almost a year, but when they went on sale, they were a great success. Japan became one of Biba's most important markets.

Feeling ambitious, Barbara and Fitz decided to launch the cosmetics and clothes in New York. Bergdorf Goodman Store on Fifth Avenue in New York was the venue. In 1970, when the smaller version of Biba opened on the sixth floor of Bergdorf Goodman, the response was fantastic. The first week, the profit totalled a grand 30.000 dollars ! Soon, other American stores wanted to accomodate Biba outlets, but Barbara and Fitz felt it would stretch their resources too far - so they only distributed their cosmetics to them. When they returned home, they left their house in Brunswick Gardens and moved to a bigger studio house near Holland Park.

Since 'Biba' began, Barbara had always nurtured in her mind that one day it would be as big as Harrods. Not only that, but she had spotted the perfect building to realise that dream. It was the vacant Derry and Toms department store, close by Kensington High Street. She had fallen in love with the place when the shop in Kensington High Street opened. She had also noticed a beautiful roof garden on the top of the building. That decided her. She had to have it. Fitz arranged all the negotiations for the building. It wasn't an easy task, they had to deal with unreasonable people. Eventually, Fitz came up with the money the grand sum of £400,000. This of course was raised by Biba's other shares.

Barbara's dream seemed about to be realised. All they had to do was arrange the renovations to get the store looking exactly as they wanted it. This wasn't easy, they had a limited budget, and all expenses had to stay within that limit. They began to have other problems too with the Kensington High Street shop. The 'Guardian' newspaper had stated in an article that the Biba girls were prevented from joining a trade union, as they would be threatened with dismissal. It seemed as if some evil was working its spell around Biba to prevent its success. This could have been true, because in the summer of 1972, the headline of the 'Evening Standard' stated that Dorothy Perkins had been taken over by British Land. This action was every retailers nightmare, and for Biba this was no exception. What were they to do? They could resign and walk away from Biba and remain financially well off - or they could stay and fight to keep Biba alive. This was what they decided to do - they couldn't desert their dream now. Renovations in the store were well underway - but there was still an incredible amount of work to get completed.

Eventually, it was completed, the whole 400,000 square feet of it. It comprised of a multitude of different departments, on six floors, including a marvellous food hall, and the magnificent Rainbow Room which was to be divided into a restaurant and two snack bars. In 1973, the 'Big Biba' empire was to be opened to the public. It was the first department store of its kind. It resembled a set from a glamorous Hollywood film of the 'Thirties'. For the roof garden, Barbara and Fitz had acquired a menagerie of flamingoes. The shop sold everything from satin sheets to washing powder, all bearing the 'Biba' name. It was a fantasy world of luxury and exotica all rolled into one. The public adored it. Business went on, with consistently good sales. Barbara and Fitz should have been pleased, but the shadow of

British Land still hung over them. Representatives started to haunt the building, waiting for things to go wrong - so they could step in and take over. The tension behind the scenes of the store was unbearable.

In early 1974, there were strikes that caused the property market to collapse. In turn, British Land was seriously affected, which in turn affected the future of Biba. Everything started to go wrong. Suddenly Barbara and Fitz had no say in the running of the store. They were out-numbered and out-voted. Their beautiful store was slipping away from them, and they could do nothing as British Land had placed alternative management to deal with the running of the store. People who knew nothing about 'Biba', who unfeelingly turned the empire into just 'another' department store. It was a heart-breaking time for them both, all their hard work and effort was passed into the hands of mindless-morons. They tried desperately to raise the finance to buy their 'Biba' back. It was like trying to raise ransom money for a kidnapped child. The times were now bad as the mid-seventies were hit hard by raising inflation. They couldn't raise enough capital. Finally after weeks of struggling and negotiating with British Land, Barbara and Fitz were forced to let go. The store was totally at the peril of British Land.

To Barbara and Fitz, losing their store was like losing a child the pain and the loss was unbearable and Barbara wanted nothing more than to get away as far as she could go. They tried one last shot by trying to buy back the thriving cosmetics company and all the Biba trade marks, but were refused. A few weeks later Barbara and Fitz left for Brazil to start a new life. At the time, they couldn't stay in England to be continually reminded of their loss. Even when they were thousands of

miles away, four separate Biba boutiques had got together to get a court order to prevent Barbara and Fitz from using the 'Biba' name. That was the last thing Barbara had wanted to do. Instead, she reverted to her father's name Hulanicki, for business. No-one could take that from her.

Barbara and Fitz then started designing clothes for the Upper-class Brazilians. Four years later, they returned to England. Barbara then quickly established herself designing clothes for the Japanese. As well as this, she launched another range of cosmetics under the 'Hulanicki' range - along with boots and shoes.

But there will never be another 'Biba', and to all of those who still possess their first 'Biba' dress must forever mourn its passing.....

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