

GOUDE *THE* GREAT

Graphic designer, illustrator, director, photographer ... is there anything JEAN-PAUL GOUDE can't do? With a major retrospective opening this fall, his old friend GLENN O'BRIEN catches up with the man behind some of Bazaar's most tantalizing images.

For some reason, I always end up seeing Jean-Paul Goude at the same restaurant in Paris. La Méditerranée, on Place de l'Odeon, opened in 1942 and is a glimpse into a fast-receding world of wit, sophistication, and charm. Jean Cocteau designed the plates; Christian Bérard, the painter and fashion illustrator, created the whimsical murals; if you blur your eyes, you can almost see Orson Welles or Ava Gardner across the room. It's about timeless chic. Kind of like Jean-Paul. I don't have to blur my eyes to see him as the same guy I met in the '70s, when he was an art director at *Esquire*.

He still dresses in the same mode: the white bucks (with lifts), the gray T-shirt (probably with subtle shoulder padding), the bespoke cropped pants (undoubtedly designed to achieve some optical illusion, like the curved lines Iktinos and Kallikrates designed into the Parthenon). Gone is the baseball cap he wore in the late '90s. Jean-Paul's hair now looks the same as when we met: same style and volume, pretty much the same color. (Don't ask.) The only variable one expects from him is the smart tailored jacket. Tonight it's a heathery-green tweed that's an exact match with his eyes. ▶



An haute couture fantasy: Linda Evangelista plays Karl Lagerfeld's blushing bride while *Bazaar's* creative director, Stephen Gan, tosses confetti and the photographer himself, Jean-Paul Goude, sweeps up the mess, December 2003

I was in my 20s when I met him. Jean-Paul wasn't much older, but he was an eminence. I had been editor of *Interview*, but he was the greatest magazine artist in the world. Hand plucked from Paris in 1968 by Harold Hayes, the legendary editor of *Esquire*, Jean-Paul (along with George Lois) provided the visual wit that accompanied the new journalism's elite—Wolfe, Talese, Mailer, Vidal.

Jean-Paul started off as an absolutely ace illustrator, a stylish, impeccable draftsman. Then he developed a new way of combining his skills as a painter and collagist with the realism of photography. By cutting up photographs and painting them, he essentially invented what Photoshop does about 20 years before Photoshop was introduced (1990). He produced painted photo illustrations like *What if Nixon were black?*, *What if Helen Gurley Brown were a man?*, and Mao swimming in the Yangtze with a rubber duckie. And he created hilarious stories like "The French Correction," which gave away his secrets for trompe l'oeil self-improvement, using visual tricks to enhance one's image.

I sort of idolized Jean-Paul, but he was too cool to notice. As a "Warhol acolyte," I didn't buy into the supremacy of the fine-art world. To me, Jean-Paul was one of the greatest artists because he had the guts to not settle. He didn't want just collectors, reviews, high prices, and retrospectives, he wanted a big audience. And so he took what was commonly considered the lower path of commercial art at a time when fine art was entering its megabuck phase. But on a technical and conceptual level, he blew almost all the gallery guys out of the water.

Jean-Paul had the guts to do what he wanted and wear what he wanted. He lived in a penthouse in Union Square in New York, a modernist house on top of a commercial building, and he had a terrace that seemed as if it was an acre and had an Everlast heavy bag hanging outside. He was obsessed with boxing, among other things, and was trying to make a movie starring a young Puerto Rican boxer named Chu Chu Malave. Jean-Paul knew what made New York great—it wasn't the Park Avenue crowd or the painters at the Cedar Tavern but the blacks, the Puerto



"The French people see me as a CUTE LITTLE jumping leprechaun," says Goude



Evangelista carries on the couture fashion message with Christian Lacroix (top) and Jean Paul Gaultier, December 2003

Ricans, the gays, the hipsters, and the weirdos—and in 1974 we did an epic *Esquire* special together called "America Dances," showing how our various cultural tribes got down.

Jean-Paul's girlfriend then was Toukie Smith, model sister of designer Willi Smith, and his studio was filled with sculptures of her. His concept was about making people works of art. That explained the way he put himself together but also the way he remade his muses. After Toukie, he took up with my ex Grace Jones in the late '70s. He said to me, "You can tell me. She is like a wild animal in bed, no?"

"Um, I don't know, Jean-Paul. What are wild animals like in bed?" But it didn't matter. His imagination was on fire already, and the way he saw Grace was the way the world would eventually see her and acclaim her as a star. And after Grace, there was Farida Khelfa, the French-Arab amazon, and after Farida was his current wife, Karen Park, a petite Korean. What they all have in common is an exoticism that's as much about Jean-Paul's imagination as their reality, but that's what makes a muse.

After *Esquire* and after Grace and the world-changing music videos he made for her, in the early '80s he returned to Paris, where his beloved mother lived, and he became the world's greatest TV-commercial artist. His commercials, for Chanel, Kodak, Perrier, and others, with their inimitable, pixilated wit, were in a league of their own. For Chanel's men's fragrance *Égoïste*, Goude brought a famous Ormond Gigli photo to life, with 32 evening-gowned models slamming balcony doors on a five-story Riviera palazzo, angrily shouting in unison, "Égoïste!"

His ultimate client turned out to be his country itself. When it was time for France to celebrate its bicentennial, the nation (via François Mitterrand) turned to him to create the parade to end all parades, on Bastille Day, July 14, 1989. More than 8,000 performers, musicians, drummers, and dancers, along with a million and a half in attendance, made for an incredible marching revue representing the cultural diversity of France, its former colonies, and its allies. There never has been, nor will there ever be again, such an event. Jean-Paul chuckles that that dream of French cultural diversity has also vanished like a dream.

Anyway, here we are, two veteran boulevardiers eating fish, drinking Bordeaux, and talking about his upcoming retrospective, which opens in November at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs at the Louvre. Knowing how discreet, elusive, modest, and even humble he is, I was surprised he would consent to something entailing such publicity. He says that at first he didn't want to do it, didn't want a show all about him, but then he found the

huge locomotive that he had built for the bicentennial parade, the one that rolled up the Champs-Élysées without tracks, and knew that he had something big that he could base a show around.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg. Self-adulation, the way celebrities talk about themselves in the third person, is anathema to Jean-Paul's style, so he had to come up with a justifying theology. And it came from a philosopher.

JEAN-PAUL GOUDE: The show is called "Goudemalion." In '87, I had a show in Marseille, and I wanted some things written for it, and Azzedine Alaïa suggested a friend of his who is a philosopher, Edgar Morin. He said okay, we met, we talked, and he wrote this thing that sort of went, "Jean-Paul Goude, typical New York-type artist, is interesting, though he is mistaken about himself. He thinks he is a Pygmalion. Pygmalion the story is about an artist who falls in love with a statue, and he loves the statue so much, it becomes a real woman. Goudemalion is a man who falls in love with real women, and he wants to transform them into statues, so he's got a problem." I never considered myself Pygmalion. Journalists, people see me like that, and maybe I am that in essence, but I've never really thought about it.

GLENN O'BRIEN: I think that's psychoanalyzing the idea of the French correction, giving it a kind of Freudian psychosexual motivation.

JPG: Exactly. The French people see me as a cute little jumping leprechaun. Or that's how they saw me at the height of my glory. It's not me, but I welcome it. It's a sort of parallel character built around me. This show is his show, and that permits me to speak of myself in the third person and not come off like some megalomaniac. This is Goudemalion's retrospective. So now bringing in my girlfriends and telling secrets of how I did this and that is fine because it's a character. It's an exaggeration. What I really am is something else.

GO: So by believing in the way people see you, as a separate character, you can look back?

JPG: Yeah. If I say so myself, I find ►



Designers plus a dash of daring. From top: Marc Jacobs with Naomi Campbell, September 2007, and Evangelista with Donatella Versace and with Valentino, December 2003.



Wild-thing Campbell on an African adventure, September 2009



Campbell, September 2009

Goudemalion's story charming. He was born under the shadow of this great big fake rock that represented to him all the wild countries he dreamed about, that he read about in comic books. That artificial territory nurtured his sensibility, and his character developed through meeting different women—first his mother, then his girlfriend, the daughter of the concierge—and it's amusing how he takes care of his muses. Unlike a homosexual designer, he designs them for himself. It's more like fetishism. He remakes the girls for sexual reasons. The images are really for my personal consumption.

GO: You invented the idea of Photoshop more than 20 years before Photoshop came to be.

JPG: I didn't invent anything. I just wanted to make fake documents. I wanted to do incredibly realistic pictures that weren't real. It was fun to mislead the public. It was magic.

GO: The public had a more innocent eye then. Seeing isn't believing anymore.

JPG: Yeah, but photomontage has always existed. It was more painstaking to do, but it always existed. Changing a little gesture in a photograph or changing the order of how people are standing, [Richard] Avedon did that. He did a lot of doctoring of photographs, but he never told anybody. He didn't have to. I tell everybody because I want to be noticed. I'm like a magician showing how I do the tricks.

Artifice is artifice. If you are photographing a group and someone is in the back and you put them on a little platform, that artifice doesn't show. It's the same thing. Whether it's done before the shot or after,

who cares? It's all about the emotion you have when you see the picture. I love the picture of Naomi [Campbell] in Africa fighting with the crocodile. We found an unbelievably beautiful rubber crocodile, and we rented it and put it in the middle of a swamp, and hundreds of people gathered around, and the police arrived. They thought a crocodile had escaped from the zoo. It was a big deal in the papers. But it was a way of doing an interesting anecdotal image. Doing that in the context of *Bazaar* works especially well in the context of the fashion photographs.

"I love the picture of Naomi {Campbell} in Africa FIGHTING with the crocodile," says Goude

I was friends with Azzedine for a while, but I think it really bonded us when I started taking lots of pictures of him with my girlfriend Farida. He was a friend, and I found him to be the best, most amusing visual match to Farida. They made a good-looking romantic couple, like Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald in *The Merry Widow*. When you think of Farida's personality, it's difficult to find somebody to show her off. Azzedine was perfect because of the height difference and he's unusual. It broke the cliché of the couple. I think maybe it was unconscious on my part because I'm little and I've always liked big women. I like the idea of a big woman and a little man. It's silly, but it's graphic, really, a graphic solution. I think it bonded our friendship, not that

we were poking fun at the business, but he was actually saying I do what I want to do, with whom I want, when I want. I don't have to conform just because I'm in this business. So because I had all these pictures of Azzedine, I thought it would be fun to observe the fashion scene by doing pictures of designers. It happened quite naturally. I knew them all.

GO: Tell me about Karl Lagerfeld.

JPG: I've known Karl Lagerfeld for years, just from being around Paris. I finally got to really know him at Chanel. Karl is grand. He is a character of the sort they don't make anymore, a real eccentric in the tradition of Ludwig II of Bavaria. He's the real thing, and he's funny.

GO: And an amazing worker.

JPG: I understand working that way. I'm working more and more now because I don't want to think. I have a wife I adore, I have a family, but I don't want to have time to be bluesy or sad because my friends are disappearing. So you work harder. Work really brings a lot of pleasure. He's right to do that. Jealous people talk about how all he does is work. What do they know? They get drunk, they eat rich food in fancy restaurants, they go sailing on the weekend, which is dangerous and bad for the skin, they come back exhausted, and meanwhile Karl has done three ad campaigns. I prefer his lifestyle anytime.

GO: Who are your favorite designers that you've shot?

JPG: Jean Paul Gaultier is a great designer, a talent who represents his generation because of the variety of things he's done and the incredible influence

he's had on the French public. In a democratic way, everybody loves him. I did an amusing thing with him about morphing because he was fascinated with it and had done a collection on it.

Christian Lacroix is my favorite to photograph. It's his character. He's very literate, shy, and introverted, but at the same time he's out there in the business. His model is looking in a mirror shaped like a cross. I like that kind of portraiture.

I loved shooting Valentino. A beautiful girl is kissing his hand while he's feeding a dog. That's a really old-fashioned photograph, like something Robert Doisneau would have done. He is like a Roman emperor. I've always wanted to poke fun at designers, but in a fun way.

GO: Did you know Marc Jacobs when you shot him for *Bazaar*?

JPG: Not at all. Stephen Gan organized it. He was very nice, very American, very bouncy. "Hi! How are you?!" He looked really good. He was tanned, muscles everywhere. He looked like a trained ballet dancer. I had a girl's tutu in the studio, and he wore it and thought it was cute, and I had a picture.

GO: I know you say that your art comes from fetishism. We aren't religious, but there is a sort of primal magic involved in it. You made statues of Toukie Smith with a much bigger butt, and she evolved into what you designed. Grace certainly mutated into your vision.

JPG: Well, in and out of that vision. For me, that character isn't Grace; it's my char-

acter. I'm showing it in this show. She adopted that character. She could have rejected it too. I just saw a little cartoon by Jean-Philippe Delhomme about hip people, and Grace is there, and it's my Grace. It's my Grace who went into people's unconscious. I'm happy about that.

GO: Does she see it that way?

JPG: No. Our relationship is like politics. You give me this; I'll give you that. I did a photo of her for the cover of *V* magazine, wearing a disco hat designed by Philip Treacy, smoking



Left: Goude and his wife, Karen Park Goude, 2009. Right: Goude with Grace Jones, 1980.

a cigarette. Her manager asked me how much I wanted for her to use it for a record cover, and I said, "You can have it. Just don't give me any problem over the show." We trade. Really, that's our history. She needed somebody, and I needed somebody. We're like Aesop's fable about the blind man and the man who can't walk. Together they can get around. That's the story of Grace and me.

Sitting here 40 years after we met, we're oddly the same—a little the worse for wear but arguably better too. Jean-

Paul gripes about aging and complains when he can't remember Tim Walker's last name right off (the one photographer who doesn't retouch is his favorite now), but he's fighting age tooth and nail. He has that same twinkle in those eyes, the color of his jacket. I know where it comes from—the muse!

JPG: I love it when my wife comes back from playing tennis. She has gotten rid of all the water in her body and is completely drawn, and because she has these pure Asian features, everything is so well organized in her little round face, with a kind of Brancusi purity. I am just in awe, in love. Now, if she has been going out with me for a week and drinking, she starts swelling up, and it shows immediately, and I start my litany of "You shouldn't drink; you should do this or that." I coach her so she can become as beautiful as she is when she comes back from playing tennis. It's crazy.

GO: Does she coach you back?

JPG: No. She's smart. She understands my way of seeing things. It's really at the basis of my personality. There's nothing I can do about it. It's my strength also. She's my wife. She wants me to be successful. We're a team. We're touching on very profound subjects. I don't have the vocabulary or the intelligence to develop all these themes, but they are trotting around my mind.

GO: That's fine. We'll take everyone to the threshold of the profound and just leave them there.

JPG: Yes, enter at your own risk! ■