



# House of Versace: The Untold Story of Genius, Murder, and Survival

By Deborah Ball

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**House of Versace: The Untold Story of Genius, Murder, and Survival** By Deborah Ball

*Versace*. The very name conjures up images of outrageous glamour and bold sexuality, opulence and daring. All of course true, but only half the story. Versace is also the legacy of a great creative genius from a poor, backward part of southern Italy who transformed the fashion world through his intuitive understanding of both women and how a changing culture influenced the way they wanted to dress. The first book in English about the legendary designer, **House of Versace** shows how Gianni Versace, with his flamboyant sister Donatella at his side, combined his virtuosic talent and extraordinary ambition to almost single-handedly create the celebrity culture we take for granted today.

Gianni Versace was at the height of his creative powers when he was murdered in Miami Beach. The story was front page news around the world and the manhunt for his killer a media obsession. His beloved sister Donatella demanded no less than a funeral befitting an assassinated head-of-state to be held in Milan's magnificent cathedral. In what was the ultimate fashion show, the world's rich and beautiful – Princess Dianna, Elton John, Carla Bruni, Naomi Campbell, Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy, Anna Wintour and others – gathered to mourn a man already considered one of fashion's great pioneers.

Deborah Ball, a long-time Milan correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, conducted hundreds of interviews with Versace family members, Gianni Versace's lovers and business rivals, models such as Naomi Campbell whom he helped shoot to international stardom and fashion industry icons, including Anna Wintour, the legendary editor of *Vogue*.

Ball vividly recounts the behind-the-scenes struggles – both creative and business – of Donatella as she stepped out of her brother's long shadow and took control of the House of Versace. The book offers the first inside look at the enormous challenges Donatella faced in living up to Gianni's genius, her struggle with a drug habit, her battles with her brother Santo and the mystery of why Gianni left control of his house to Donatella's young daughter, Allegra. **House of Versace** is a compelling, highly readable tale of rise from obscurity, a painful fall and

ultimate redemption as the Versace empire returned to health – for now.

Bringing together fashion, celebrity, business drama, jet-set lifestyles, and a notorious crime, **House of Versace** is an old-fashioned page-turner about a subject of enduring fascination.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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## House of Versace: The Untold Story of Genius, Murder, and Survival By Deborah Ball Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #66831 in Books
- Published on: 2011-01-04
- Released on: 2011-01-04

- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .80" w x 5.20" l, .61 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 360 pages



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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Meticulously researched...answers more questions about the family behind the high-flying brand than most of us could think to ask. The Wall Street Journal writer's account ... helps humanize a legendary family.--  
The Wall Street Journal

"Deborah Ball got the story. Thanks to an impressive degree of access to both Santo and Donatella, as well as to a host of their friends and family members, this Wall Street Journal writer describes in riveting detail what the siblings were thinking behind their grief-stricken visages."--The Washington Post

"Readers may feel as if they are breaking through the sequined barrier that has sheltered the family from the world's eye; that the shroud of mystery around them is finally lifted. The result is a read that is genuinely honest and riveting."--The Associated Press

*From the Hardcover edition.*

#### About the Author

A native of Boston, DEBORAH BALL has been a business journalist in Europe for more than 15 years. For 12 years, she has been a reporter for the *Wall Street Journal* in Milan, London and Zurich, covering a wide variety of business, finance and political topics. Between 1999 and 2002, she covered the European luxury goods sector for the Journal. Ms. Ball currently lives between Italy and Switzerland with her husband Fabrizio.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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One

“They’ve Shot Gianni”

It was midafternoon on July 15, 1997, and a breathless heat had settled on Rome, making the Eternal City so hot that stiletto heels sank slightly into the melting asphalt, leaving pockmarks on the sidewalk. Piazza di Spagna, with its undulating, double-helix staircase, was a hive of activity. Early that morning, police had cleared the cream-colored marble steps, shooing away the penny-ante artists and the slick Romeos who chatted up pretty tourists, so that television crews could mount bulky cameras and lights onto two makeshift towers.

The crews were setting up for the next evening’s broadcast of *Donna sotto le stelle*, or *Woman Under the Stars*. *Donna sotto le stelle* was the sort of eye candy that had become a staple of Italian television in the 1980s. Eighteen

fashion houses, including Valentino and Fendi, would send their most fabulous evening gowns sashaying down the floodlit Spanish Steps, with the balmy backdrop of Rome adding to the festive air. To add a pinch of drama, the organizers of the show always chose one designer to honor. This year, they’d picked Gianni Versace.

Gianni's sister, Donatella, had arrived the evening before at the Hotel De La Ville, a seventeenth-century palazzo turned hotel perched at the top of the steps. As usual, she stayed in the best room—a deluxe eighth-floor penthouse with a wraparound terrace that offered postcard views stretching from the cupola of the Vatican to the Colosseum. The suite boasted a white baby grand piano, bequeathed to the hotel by composer Leonard Bernstein, who had once lived there for six months. Santo, the elder brother of Donatella and Gianni, hated fancy suites and had unpacked his bags in a more modest room at the same hotel.

That morning, each house had had an hour-long slot to rehearse its models on the Spanish Steps, the trickiest of catwalks, with 135 marble stairs, many worn slippery smooth from centuries of tourist traffic. Dozens of models gingerly tested their descents in the stilettos they would wear the next day. Donatella had the first slot for the rehearsal that morning. The producers knew the ratings dropped soon after the start of the show, as a marathon of pretty models in pretty clothes tired viewers quickly, so they had scheduled the most important designers first. This year, Versace was to open the show. Due to the unwieldy number of designers, the show's organizers had set a limit of no more than fifteen dresses each. Donatella had ignored the quota and brought thirty-five, confident that the house's signature glitz would be irresistible to the show's producers and that no one would complain.

Moreover, she was bringing Naomi Campbell, the star of supermodels, famous for her perfect body, her showmanship, and her ability to work a dress with grace and swagger. Naomi was too important to attend that morning's run-through, so another girl had stood in for her. Naomi had arrived in Italy a few days before to take in a quick holiday on the Amalfi coast, and a chauffeured car was ferrying her to Rome for the evening dress rehearsal. Even in a world crowded with million-dollar egos, Naomi was the ultimate diva, thanks as much to her personal antics as to her lithe body. The twenty-seven-year-old superstar's appetite for gorgeous men, fast cars, and copious amounts of cocaine provided endless fodder for gossip columns. Naomi's tantrums were legendary: She would throw such a violent fit over lost luggage in London that police officers had to drag her kicking and screaming from the plane. Another time, she threw a cell phone at her maid, leaving a gash that required stitches.

But with Gianni, Naomi was a different, more tractable creature. She had long been his favorite model—the woman he often had in mind when he designed his gowns. She showed off his frocks in their full glamour, her feline grace a perfect foil for his lissome dresses. Versace had brought her fame as one of the original supermodels, the group of exquisite girls Gianni had launched. He also played the role of the protective big brother, a salve to her skittish, high-strung character. Cementing her bond with the clan, Naomi had become fast friends with Donatella, who often invited her for weekends at the Versace mansion on Lake Como.

As Naomi made her way to Rome, two conference rooms on the first floor of the Hotel De La Ville had been transformed into a makeshift backstage, overflowing with pre-fashion-show detritus, as makeup artists, hairdressers, and seamstresses wrangled the girls into the highly polished, über-sexy Versace look for the dress rehearsal. Dressed in skinny jeans and devoid of makeup, the girls sat giggling and gossiping, sipping on cans of Diet Coke and chatting as they waited their turns. Some were as young as fourteen and still had prepubescent, almost boyish figures. Indeed, aside from the supermodels, many models are surprisingly plain without makeup. They are chameleons that designers can transform into the type of women they want to project that season.

Against one wall stood a line of vanity tables, outfitted with bright klieg lights and littered with bottles, tubes, and hairpieces. Makeup artists held the girls' chins firmly, turning their heads left and right to get a good look at their work. The room grew stifling with the sickly smell of hair spray, cigarette smoke, and espresso vapors. Because the show was just a one-night stand and not part of a fashion marathon, the hair and makeup people had a relatively easy time of it. During fashion week, when the girls scurry from show to

show, the hair and makeup artists have to rush to remove the fake nails, elaborate hairdos, or full-body bronzing gel that the last designer demanded. A model who works the whole five-week runway season will find her skin, hair, and nails wrecked by the relentless grooming.

Once made up, the bare-breasted models stripped down to just heels and tiny G-strings, their Brazilian bikini waxes on full display, and waited for dressers to help them wiggle into the clothes without smudging their makeup or leaving stains on the dresses from the greasy lotion they'd applied to their legs to make them shine under the lights. Models often crash-dieted or downed laxatives before a big show, so Versace's motherly seamstresses, pins hanging from their mouths, stood ready to nip and tuck dresses to make them fit again. Double-sided tape was strapped to the models' breasts to keep them from popping out of Versace's signature plunging necklines on stage. Trays of food sat untouched.

Donatella's assistants then took Polaroid shots of each woman in her assigned dress, complete with any jewelry and handbags she would wear for the show. The photos were then taped to a rack holding the entire outfit, so that the models wouldn't forget anything. Donatella was watching a seamstress fit a model into a dress, mulling some last-minute changes to the lineup, when her cell phone rang. Of course, it was Gianni, calling from Miami Beach to pepper her with questions.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Frank Keating:**

This House of Versace: The Untold Story of Genius, Murder, and Survival book is not ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you have by reading this book is information inside this reserve incredible fresh, you will get info which is getting deeper anyone read a lot of information you will get. This specific House of Versace: The Untold Story of Genius, Murder, and Survival without we realize teach the one who looking at it become critical in pondering and analyzing. Don't end up being worry House of Versace: The Untold Story of Genius, Murder, and Survival can bring whenever you are and not make your case space or bookshelves' grow to be full because you can have it with your lovely laptop even mobile phone. This House of Versace: The Untold Story of Genius, Murder, and Survival having excellent arrangement in word in addition to layout, so you will not really feel uninterested in reading.

#### **Carlos Callahan:**

The feeling that you get from House of Versace: The Untold Story of Genius, Murder, and Survival is a more deep you excavating the information that hide within the words the more you get serious about reading it. It doesn't mean that this book is hard to be aware of but House of Versace: The Untold Story of Genius, Murder, and Survival giving you excitement feeling of reading. The author conveys their point in selected way that can be understood by anyone who read the idea because the author of this book is well-known enough. That book also makes your vocabulary increase well. So it is easy to understand then can go to you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We recommend you for having this House of Versace: The Untold Story of Genius, Murder, and Survival instantly.

**Verna Riddle:**

Exactly why? Because this House of Versace: The Untold Story of Genius, Murder, and Survival is an unordinary book that the inside of the reserve waiting for you to snap the idea but latter it will distress you with the secret the item inside. Reading this book beside it was fantastic author who also write the book in such remarkable way makes the content inside easier to understand, entertaining approach but still convey the meaning entirely. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this ever again or you going to regret it. This phenomenal book will give you a lot of benefits than the other book get such as help improving your talent and your critical thinking means. So , still want to hold up having that book? If I have been you I will go to the guide store hurriedly.

**Kathy Norvell:**

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