

# Lost Angel

*The Death and Life  
Of a Woman of  
Fashion*

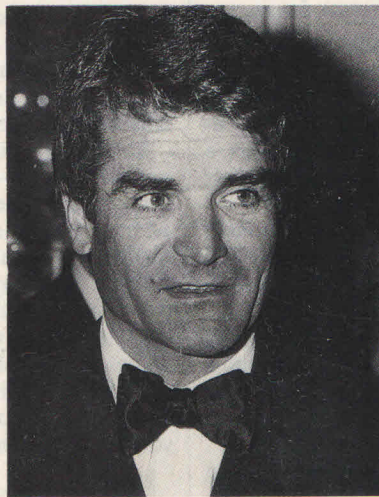
*By Michael Gross*

**I**N MAY OF LAST YEAR, TWO YEARS AFTER learning she had the HIV virus, Tina Chow checked into New York's Beth Israel hospital. Though thousands of AIDS patients had passed through its doors, Chow was unlike any of them—and not just because she was a woman.

Like some urbane gypsy, Chow, the fashion icon, brought with her a profusion of Japanese baskets and

Rubbermaid containers filled with her favorite things and the palliatives she believed in: a gold traveling Buddha, healing crystals, vitamin supplements, and herbal pills and potions—even a jar of dried locusts she brewed into tea.

As the sparrow-thin woman stepped from a car to the busy street corner, she showed no anger or fear. She was an island of calm in the rush of noisy cars and pedestrians. Head erect, swaddled in white fabric, she entered the hospital's bustling reception area with Nadia Ghaleb, a longtime friend.



"God, Teen," Ghaleb told her, "you look just like Gandhi."

"I feel like Gandhi," Chow replied with an impish Cheshire-cat grin.

Eight months later, just before 3 A.M. on Friday, January 24, 1992, Tina Chow died at her home in Pacific Palisades, California, and became, by her own design, a public symbol. From now on, she will be known as the first prominent woman to die of AIDS and admit—or, more precisely, announce—that she'd been infected through heterosexual sex.

Chow made quite an impact in her 41 years. She first became well known in Tokyo, as a model for Shiseido cosmetics in the late sixties. She was eighteen. Four years later, she moved to London and married restaurant man Michael Chow. While raising two children, she helped run an empire that eventually expanded to three continents. As hostess of their Mr. Chow restaurants, she became a central figure in the social set that dominated the past two decades. But Tina wasn't only Mrs.

PHOTOGRAPH BY HELMUT NEWTON



Tina circa three, in an ad with sister Bonny, left, in 1970, and in portraits by Cecil Beaton (above) and Terry O'Neill.



Chow. She designed jewelry out of crystal encased in bamboo or precious metal and hung from silken cords and was a favorite subject of photographers like Cecil Beaton, Helmut Newton, Herb Ritts, and David Seidner. Her androgynous beauty could literally stop traffic—in 1985, while Tina was visiting China with her husband, her looks caused bicycle riders to collide on the street. “What kind of human being is that?” they asked.

Her style was an effortless mix of East and West. A member of the International Best Dressed List Hall of Fame, she haunted auctions and flea markets and became a premier collector of antique and couture clothes (an exhibition of highlights from her collection opens March 16 at the Fashion Institute of Technology). But she could most often be found in a simple T-shirt, a man’s cardigan, and a favored pair of Kenzo jodhpurs she’d had copied and recopied for years.

As a muse and favored customer of the world’s greatest fashion designers, she helped set the style of her era. Karl Lagerfeld credits her with inventing minimal chic. “Nobody looked better in it than Tina did,” he says.

“Tina had an innate elegance and never needed any designer to do anything for her,” says Giorgio Armani. “Rather, she did a lot for us.”

“She worked for me as a model,” says Yves Saint Laurent. “She did it for her own pleasure. I really liked Tina Chow.”

“She was a match that lights some things and helps them burn brighter,” says Zandra Rhodes. “She was an attractive, intelligent instigator.”

Chow drifted away from the fashion scene in the mid-eighties, her enjoyment of its momentary pleasures dulled as friends died of AIDS, her marriage broke up after an affair with actor Richard Gere, and she discovered her own illness in spring 1989. Although she had a taste for champagne, she had rarely indulged in the lunacy of the times. Those who knew her say flatly that she was neither promiscuous nor a drug abuser. But her exotic looks and superficial friends suggested little depth to a world that saw her as an image—not a wife and mother.

You wouldn’t have guessed that was what she was if you listened to the drumbeats before her death. Chow’s condition and its origins were the subject of speculation on three continents.

In January, the *Globe*, a supermarket tabloid, ran a story about Chow titled RICHARD GERE HONEYMOON AIDS SHOCKER—FORMER GIRLFRIEND DYING OF GAY PLAGUE. Bill Spear, a macrobiotic counselor Chow consulted before her death, says reporters were picking through garbage and “watching for limousines” outside her house as she lay on her deathbed.

After Chow’s death, her family released a statement suggesting that the source of her illness might have been “an extremely brief affair with a bisexual man in Paris who has since died of AIDS.” Within days, columnist Richard Johnson speculated that he was Kim d’Estainville, a Parisian social sort who’d died of AIDS in December 1990.

To Chow’s intimates, these inquiries were worse than an invasion of privacy—they missed the point. But although they’ve been put off by some members of the press, they haven’t retreated from talking about Chow.

“People live in such a tremendous state of denial,” says Nadia Ghaleb. “Hot guys think they’ll never get AIDS. Girls don’t want to lose a guy. The message is you can have an affair shorter than the blink of an eye and get it. You *can* get AIDS through heterosexual transmission. You don’t have to be promiscuous.”

So what is Tina Chow’s legacy? “Hey, wake up,” Ghaleb says. “Protect yourself. Be educated. Believe in yourself. Train your children. The other side of the coin is a scary place to be.”

**T**INA CHOW’S FIRST BRUSH WITH FAME CAME WHEN SHE WAS just a few months old. She and her older sister, Adelle “Bonny” Lutz—now a costume designer married to musician David Byrne—made a brief appearance in *I Was a Japanese War Bride*, a film based on the story of their mother and father.

Walter Edmund Lutz was an American soldier serving in occupied Japan after World War II. He met Mona Furuki on a cafeteria line at a ski slope there on Christmas Day, 1945. Discharged from the Eighth Army, he briefly returned to Ohio, but his love of Japan and Mona drew him back to work with the occupation government. The couple married in 1947.

Lutz had a second Asian affair that would deeply affect his



As she grew older, Chow became a favorite of illustrators like Antonio Lopez (above) and designers like Karl Lagerfeld for Chanel (near right).



younger daughter. "My father discovered bamboo," Tina Chow said in the book *Antonio's Girls*. Seeing how the hardy plant was used in everything from tea ceremonies to buildings, he became obsessed with it, eventually gathering a museum-quality collection. "It became a total involvement. After the war, he moved back to Cleveland with my mother and opened a store called the Bamboo House, filled with bamboo objects," said Chow. "Now, who would want any of that stuff right after the war—in Cleveland?" Nonetheless, the Lutzes raised bamboo along with their two bilingual daughters.

Growing up half Japanese just after World War II wasn't easy. "It was the fifties and the early sixties," Tina said, "and people believed in everything. They believed that God *did* bless America. The only problem was that I wasn't all-American, and there was no alternative to being all-American. Everyone was a cheerleader or aspired to be one. . . . I never went on a date, was never asked out, was never asked to dance."

Though she made their clothes and sometimes dressed them alike, Mona Lutz says, the acute difference between her girls was captured by the chores they did at home. Bonny—eighteen months older—worked in the yard with her father. Tina stayed inside, learned to cook and sew—and read like a demon. "She *wasn't* the girl next door," says Ghaleb. But she wasn't a wallflower; she had star quality. Walter Lutz once photographed her holding a batch of colored balloons. Looking at the pictures later, he told her, "Tina, you're going to be a model."

In 1966, the Lutzes returned to Japan, where they set up an import-export business and their daughters finished school. "It was like going back to where we belonged," Tina said of Japan,

recalling "seersucker kimonos . . . paper balls and lanterns and firecrackers . . . frogs and crickets for sale in cages and rock candies that were shocking pink, green, and white. . . . Modeling was less beautiful."

Bonny and Tina were discovered during a summer vacation in Japan, when they joined their father on a business trip and a manufacturer suggested they model for him. Mona Lutz became their manager. Shiseido hired Tina in 1968.

"They were very aware that I came from a very good family the minute my mother opened her mouth, and that's what they were looking for," Tina once said. "True, I was a half-breed, but they were also going in for that. They liked the Eurasian look."

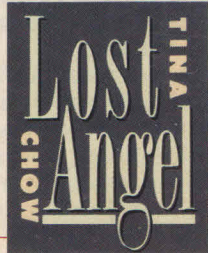
When sixteen-year-old model Marie Helvin arrived from Hawaii that year, Tina Lutz was already the most famous model in Japan. "Everybody used to talk about her," Helvin says. "They called her Tina Ratz because they couldn't pronounce the letter L." Like the Lutz girls, Helvin was a child of the occupation. "The Japanese called us 'halves,'" she says.

Issey Miyake met Tina when he was a young designer. She, her sister, and Helvin would often eat out with him. He spoke some English. "She was terribly interested in how a designer works with clothes," he says. When Tina modeled in his first fashion show, "she stayed until the middle of the night. She was not only interested in modeling but also in the spirit of the clothes and in being a medium of expression for the designer."

In 1970, the late illustrator Antonio Lopez arrived in Japan and used Tina as his model. One weekend, Antonio invited Tina out for dinner. "Something came up and I didn't call," Tina later recalled. "I felt so guilty about it. On Monday morning,

As a teenager, Tina was a sensation in Japan.

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With Michael at Mr. Chow in 1979.

who should I run into but Antonio, and he said, 'A friend of mine was here from London that you would have got along so well with.' His name was Michael Chow. It was more than a year before I finally met him."

The introduction was finally effected by British designer Zandra Rhodes. In Japan for a fashion show, she got to talking with Tina and Bonny "because we had a great rapport," she says. "At the same time, my great friend Michael Chow was returning to London from Hong Kong via Japan. He came to the show, and afterward, we all went sightseeing together."

**C**HOW, THEN 33, WAS IN TOKYO TRYING TO MAKE A MARTIAL-ARTS movie. He'd already opened many restaurants, but he'd been operating on a number of other fronts, too. Born in Shanghai in 1938, he'd been sent to boarding school in England in 1952 by his parents. His father was an actor, playwright, and master of Shanghai's Peking Opera. After studying art and architecture, young Chow became an actor, appearing in such films as *Modesty Blaise* and *You Only Live Twice*, and later *Hammett*. In the sixties, after opening a hairdressing salon, a designer boutique, and a television-commercial-production company, he had his big idea. Chinese restaurants were then tacky places filled with ersatz chinoiserie. "I wanted to communicate between East and West," Chow says, so he created a Chinese restaurant in London with a Western environment and Italian waiters.

The restaurant was a hit, and others followed. Chow also opened a café, bought a nightclub, and had been married and divorced when his friends Antonio and Rhodes "thought of matchmaking."

He was perfect for Tina Lutz. "They connected, being Asian," says Nadia Ghaleb. And just like Tina, Michael also had a Western side. "He was a wild man," Ghaleb continues. He had hair down his back, wore purple velvet Nehru jackets by Yves Saint Laurent, and drove a dark-blue Bentley convertible. "Michael was the hippest, hottest, coolest guy in London."

By summer 1971, "I'd reached the end of my rope in Japan,"

Tina said. She wanted to move to Paris, where Antonio was living the glamorous life with a revolving cast of characters that included Grace Jones, Pat Cleveland, Jerry Hall, and Jessica Lange. So when Bonny Lutz went there to study, Tina followed and modeled. Antonio introduced her to Karl Lagerfeld and "told me what was beautiful and what was awkward and superfluous," Tina said. "He gave me confidence."

Lagerfeld recalls her as "very special but much skinnier than the models then." It didn't matter. Tina was tired of the modeling grind anyway. One Sunday that summer, Michael Chow invited a gang for Sunday lunch and a Magical Mystery Tour of London in a hired coach. "It turned out to be in honor of Tina, who'd come to London secretly," Zandra Rhodes says. "They were going to get married."

Tina moved to London in 1972 and moved in with Chow. The next August, after a breakfast at the Savoy Hotel, they got married at the Chelsea Registry office. Lunch followed at Mr. Chow. "Everybody was there," says Juan Ramos, Antonio's partner. "It was wild. We were all drunk, crazy, dancing on tables." Shoe designer Manolo Blahnik took pictures. Tatum O'Neal, age nine, arrived with Bianca Jagger just as lunch ended at 4 P.M. A dinner followed at Chow's nightclub, Maunkberry's. "Then they began the life of the perfect couple," Ramos says, not without a trace of irony.

Right from the start, Michael alternated between adoring and dominating Tina. "She was very young," he says. "I'm twelve years older. I'm sort of the teacher type." Later, he adds, "I was into fashion, into artists, so the background was set for Tina."

"Michael was refined and edited by



With Jerry Hall . . .

"Michael was refined and edited by Tina," Nadia Ghaleb says. "He tended to be fickle. She grounded him. They were complementary opposites."

TINA  
Lost  
Angel  
CHOW

Tina," says Nadia Ghaleb. "She walked in the door and completed everything. She wooed the people who were attracted by Michael's energy with her grace, simplicity, and kindness. Michael tended to be fickle. She grounded him. They were complementary opposites."

Mr. Chow L.A. opened in 1973 on North Camden Drive in Beverly Hills. Tina gave birth to their daughter, China, the next spring, and the chic-est Asian couple in London became an intercontinental family. Ghaleb met them in 1975, and she and her crowd ("the young Beverly Hills kids-of-stars set," she says) began going to the restaurant every night.

Though the Chows continued to use the city as a vacation spot, they returned to London once they had Mr. Chow L.A. up and running. For the next few years, Tina raised her daughter in a double townhouse that Chow owned on Clancarty Road in Fulham (stunning Londoners with the small indoor swimming pool they installed off the dining room). Tina shopped for Mr. Chow's flowers every Tuesday morning in Covent Garden, presided over the nightly never-ending party in Knightsbridge, and modeled for friends like Lagerfeld and Rhodes.

"In that period, she flourished," says Chow, who encouraged his wife to use her eye for beauty. Chow was collecting fine Art Deco furniture by Jacques-Émile Ruhlmann, Eileen Gray, and Jean Dunand. After he bought Tina a tattered, jewel-pink pleated gown by Mariano Fortuny, she became passionate about collecting, too, buying vintage clothes, taking them apart to see how they were made, and restoring them.

Their son, Maximilian, was born in 1978. The next year, the Chows expanded again and opened a restaurant in New York. This was to be their masterpiece. Chow designed the white-gloss-lacquered space with great style: a bronze standing lamp by Giacometti, double glass doors by Lalique, a soaring ceiling sculpture by Richard Smith, white marble floors, alabaster and bronze fan-shaped sconces by Ruhlmann, ice buckets from the ship *Normandie*, padded tables lighted from below and surrounded by chairs by Josef Hoffmann. No detail was too small. Even the 28-inch-square napkins were specially commissioned. "They're like blankets," Tina said.

While renovating the restaurant, the Chows lived upstairs in a duplex bought from an old Newport family. It had a neo-Gothic Louis Comfort Tiffany interior that Mark Walsh, a vintage-fashion dealer Tina met and befriended, describes as "a satanic

mess, dark and amber, like *Citizen Kane*." Finally, in the early eighties, the Chows renovated it into a highly thought-out white-silk-walled showplace for their Art Deco furniture. "It was like the set of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*," says Walsh.

THEN, MICHAEL CHOW CHANGED. "IN THE EARLY DAYS, he was genuinely open and friendly," Nadia Ghaleb says. But now he had two children, a big business, and an important furniture collection. "They'd arrived," she continues. "His ego became more important than his spontaneity. Michael got very serious."

Chow says his change was sparked by the thaw in Chinese-American relations that let him reconnect with his family—or what was left of it. In 1981, he produced an appearance by Shanghai's Peking Opera at Alice Tully Hall. He'd had no contact with his family since he left for England in 1952 and so had never learned that his father—once venerated in China—had been purged during China's Cultural Revolution in 1966 and died in 1975. His mother had died as well, and his brother (who'd since assumed his father's roles in the opera company) had spent seven years in jail.

Discovering all this when the troupe emerged set Chow reeling. "I got a little depressed," he allows. "For the next three years, I became a little bit of a prisoner, in fact. I was going inward. Tina was going outward." Now the Mrs. became the face of Mr. Chow. "I worked my ass off," she told friends, while Michael was preoccupied with their apartment and his collection. "I was building a shrine to Ruhlmann," he says.

"He used to sit upstairs and watch the restaurant on a closed-circuit video screen," an ex-employee recalls. "That's how isolated he was."

There was a lot to watch. Each of their restaurants was grossing about \$2 million a year. In New York, the Chows attracted the newest names on the suddenly superheated art scene by trading food for art. Tina's personality kept them coming. "She made the restaurant our club," says Kenny Scharf.

On any given night, Jean Michel Basquiat might be found drinking Kir Royales with Andy Warhol and Keith Haring. "It was a little overwhelming," says Scharf. "I wasn't used to using high-class restaurants as hangouts. I'd never had Cristal. Cristal flowed in that eighties-overindulgence kind of way."

The glittering surface and the couple's Asian reticence con-

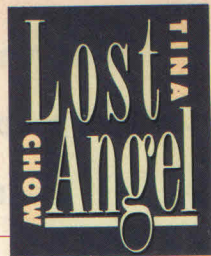


... Nick Rhodes, Andy Warhol, and Stephen Sprouse ...



... Michael Chow and Valentino.

In New York, the Chows, Tina especially, attracted the newest names on the overheated art scene. "She made the restaurant our club," says Kenny Scharf.



cealed a less happy reality, however. Reaching her thirties, Tina was no longer satisfied with her stage-set life as Mrs. Chow. She tried to find outlets apart from her husband, but some friends felt he stifled her. "Michael said she had to be Mrs. Chow," said Ricky Clifton, a fabric designer turned taxi-driving artist who met Tina after picking up Bonny Lutz in his cab in 1979.

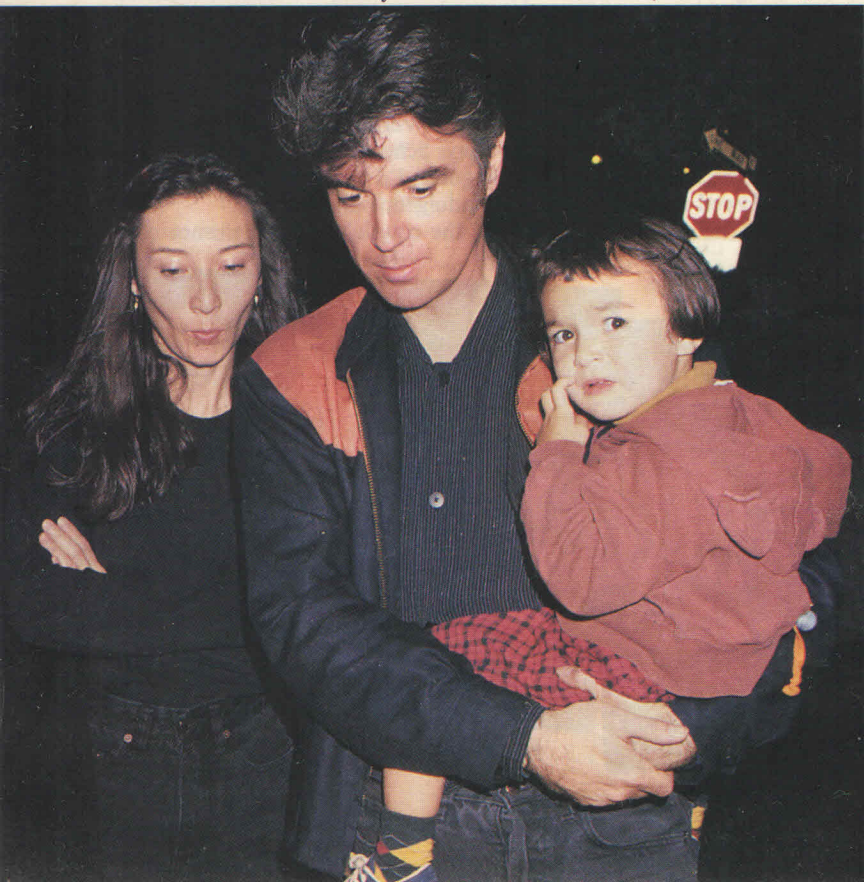
Helmut Newton's portrait of the couple, shot in 1984, sums up their relationship. Tina is bound with rope to the bar at Mr. Chow L.A. Michael stands behind it, looking on impassively. "She wouldn't have wandered later if Michael had been more understanding about her wanting her own life," Clifton says. "He wanted to keep her locked up in a white lacquer box like a puppet."

Andy Warhol played a large part in unlocking that box. Tina and Warhol became friends through the New York restaurant, and he began calling her daily, encouraging her to find a creative outlet. It is revealing that in the *Andy Warhol Diaries* there are eleven mentions of Tina and only two of Michael. By 1985, Warhol, who was desperately afraid of AIDS, was touting the virtues of crystals, which he'd discovered through a chiropractor who used them for healing. Tina got her first crystal—a cylindrical piece of aquamarine that fit neatly in her hand—at Warhol's urging in July 1985.

That was a year of great change for the Chows. They moved to Bel Air, but Tina wasn't happy there. "She couldn't operate," Michael thinks. "There was no fashion." She'd always been a frustrated designer. Now she began running off to Paris, planning a line of accessories with Lesage, the master embroiderer. But their ideas clashed, and she and Lesage parted.

The Chows started parting, too, in 1986, though it was another year before they made it official. Outwardly, they were still

Bonny with husband David Byrne and daughter.



together—at a dinner in London to unveil Warhol's portrait of Tina and in Kyoto, where they were opening another Mr. Chow—but friends noticed that more typically, as Mark Walsh puts it, "when he was here, she was there."

**M**ICHAEL CHOW SITS IN A SUITE AT THE Plaza-Athénée hotel in New York. He is staying there temporarily with fashion designer Eva Chun, whom he married just before Tina died. His bitterness is evident as I tell him the tales I've heard about why he and Tina split up. "To start with," he says, "I never had any affairs. I'm still the same. *She* changed. Because of her cultural background, she'd always had to be conservative." So when she decided to end her marriage, he thinks, "it was a bursting out instead of a gradual getting out."

The split coincided with the often desperate quest on Tina's part for a new direction. Briefly, she'd drowned her unhappiness in Kir Royales. "She wanted to get away from Michael's craziness," Juan Ramos thinks. "In that period, she got a little crazy. It's a tragic story of people climbing the ladder of international society and then it all falls apart." Ramos laughs sadly. "It would make a great Chinese opera."

Manolo Blahnik noticed the change in Tina, too, on his frequent trips to New York. "I knew deep down she was rebelling," he says. And not just against Michael. "She saw the futility," Blahnik says. "That this life was empty. She was exhausted by the shallowness of all this—you know what I mean—superficial relationships and all that. She was germinating ideas and trying to be on her own creatively."

David Seidner agrees. "No one can live on Kir Royales and espresso," he says. "I remember it making her sick. It got to her. She realized that." Chow admitted as much to the *Chicago Tribune* in 1988. "I lost several friends to AIDS and I felt my life slipping away while I continued to party," she said. "Many people are now paying more attention to just sticking around."

Chow threw herself into AIDS-charity work, stopped eating meat, studied healing disciplines, discussed astral projection with Seidner ("Michael thought she was nuts," he says), and renewed her passion for Tibetan Buddhism. "It was a pilgrimage," says Elsa Rady, a California artist she befriended. "It wasn't about having anymore. It was about being."

In L.A., she also met Lynn Nakamura, a gemologist, and started tossing around ideas for a jewelry line combining her father's passion for bamboo with her new one for crystals. On a trip to Kyoto with her mother in 1986, she met with a bamboo-basket-maker who would help produce her jewelry designs. Most important of all, perhaps, she learned to drive. "She said it made her feel free," says Marguerite Littman, a friend from London.

Liberated in that small but symbolic way, she soon cut herself loose in others. An affair with Richard Gere (who shared her interests in AIDS, modern art, and Buddhism) precipitated the end of her marriage. They'd met in L.A., and Tina fell in love with the actor. "She was dazzled by Richard," says one of her girlfriends. "But she was just another notch in his belt." Adds David Seidner, "People as artistic as Tina have their time. She wasn't ready; then she was, and she flew the coop. If it hadn't been Richard Gere, it would have been

somebody else." The Chows separated in 1987. Tina moved into the Chateau Marmont hotel.

Bergdorf Goodman opened a jewelry boutique for Tina that summer, and her line was an immediate success. She described her designs as "special pieces to be worn at special times . . . healing pieces and tools for cleansing oneself." She traveled to Hong Kong, Germany, Japan, and India in search of craftsmen and stones. "She really worked hard at perfecting her jewelry," says Seidner. "Her excitement was boundless."

Tina hired a young assistant, Grayson Riley, and would send her downtown to Kiehl's pharmacy to buy herbs and brushes that she used to scour her skin red. That struck Riley as symbolic of Chow's attempt to remove all the toxins from her life.

But more poison and sadness intruded. Andy Warhol died that February. Antonio Lopez died of AIDS a month later. Complicating matters further, Michael fought their separation. "For two years, Michael mourned," says Nadia Ghaleb. "He was the most grief-stricken man I'd ever seen."

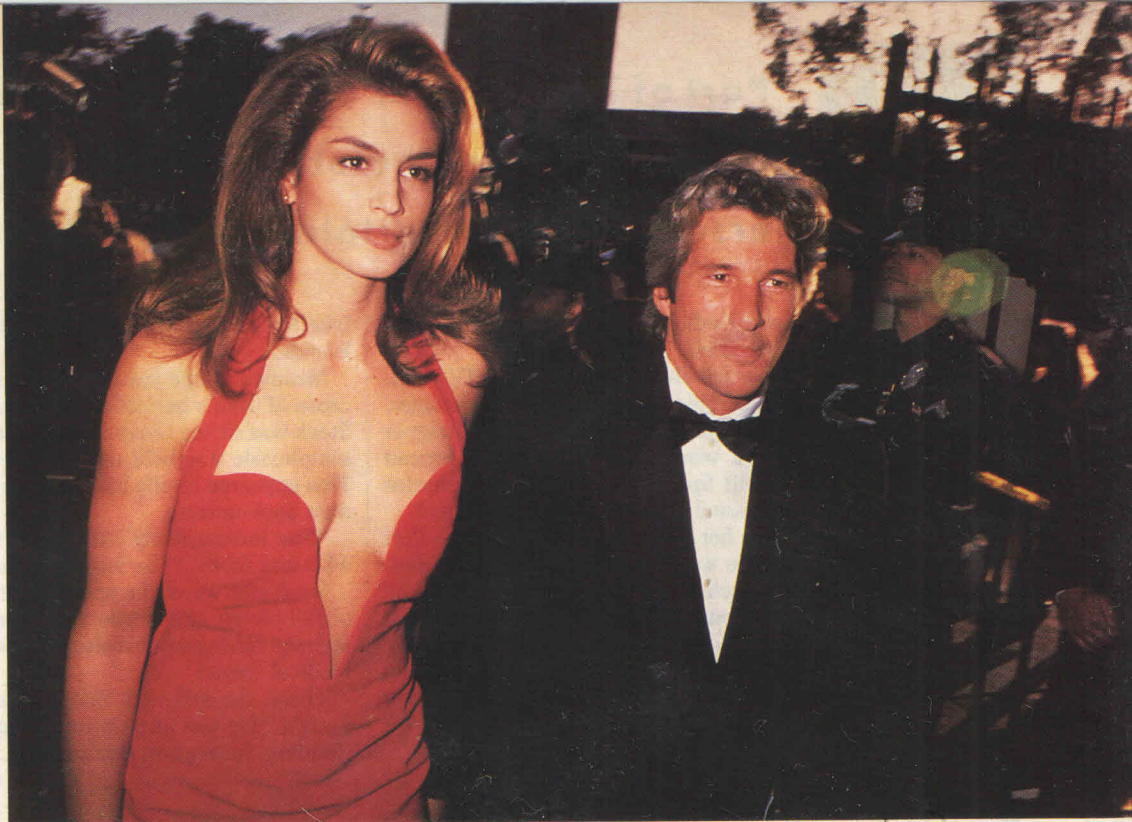
Their friends began to notice the tension. The couple fought over the disposition of their furniture collection. After the split, Michael wanted to sell it "in one go," he says. Tina didn't, and he felt that she didn't understand that the dissolution of the collection was a direct consequence of their separation. "When she confronted the reality of what had happened, she had a lot of anger," Chow says. One Sunday, she called Mark Walsh and asked him to come to 57th Street. "She was taking light fixtures down," Walsh recalls. "She'd dismantled the Ruhlmann piano on her own. She'd taken the *Normandie* doors off their hinges. It was very compulsive."

In June 1987, Tina flew to London to model a Fortuny dress she'd donated to an auction for the AIDS Crisis Trust, a charity begun by Marguerite Littman. Four days later, she was back in New York, where she appeared with Gere at an Artists Against AIDS benefit at Sotheby's. A friend calls that "the height of their affair." By the end of the summer, it had faded.

Finally, Tina began opening up to friends. She and Lynn Nakamura started an ongoing discussion about how Japanese women were taught to hide negative emotions. "Japanese women don't lash out," Nakamura says. "They build up resentment instead." Now Tina's anger at her husband also gushed forth. "She'd make remarks," says Grayson Riley. "She couldn't stand him." She was Mrs. Chow no more.

If any of her intimates know when Tina started seeing Kim d'Estainville, they aren't saying, but the two had been in the same orbit for years. A child of haut bourgeois parents, the charming bachelor-retailer-restaurateur-journalist-sportsman had long lived with Helene Rochas, former president of Rochas perfumes. They broke up when he had an affair with another man. "Helene overheard a phone call," says a well-connected Frenchwoman. "She threw him out. After that, Kim was so sad. He went to New York to the baths. That's where he got AIDS. He told me."

Before he found out he was infected, d'Estainville had several



Former boyfriend Richard Gere with wife Cindy Crawford.

affairs. Chow was in Paris often through the mid-eighties, attending couture shows and then, at the end of 1987, introducing her jewelry line in a Left Bank gallery owned by Naila de Monbrison, whom she'd met through David Seidner. Chow and d'Estainville "knew each other a long time and it happened," says Seidner. "Tina slept with four people in her entire life. There's a point to be made about AIDS in that respect. It's the disease that's the villain."

Early in 1988, Tina rented a two-story house with an unobstructed view of Santa Monica Bay in Pacific Palisades. In line with her new minimal aesthetic, the furnishings were sparse—a simple futon bed, two Ethiopian chairs, a Central American metate for grinding grain, an African washboard, and her ever-present crystals.

The following April, back in New York, she unveiled a line of lapis, crystal, and gold pieces in arrowhead shapes that she'd designed exclusively for Calvin Klein. Then, in August, she and China Chow went on a pilgrimage to Kashmir and to the Himalayas to meet the Buddhist leader the Dalai Lama. "By chance, we found out we were going there at the same time," says de Monbrison. "She was so happy she was going to see him." But just as she'd established a new foundation for her life, it started crumbling beneath her.

**B**Y EARLY 1989, CHOW WAS SHOWING SIGNS OF ILLNESS. The Chows' divorce became final around that time. Then, while working on her jewelry line in Japan in May, she collapsed, was hospitalized with pneumonia, and learned she was HIV-positive.

Just as she had once studied fashion, furniture, and jewelry, now Tina studied AIDS and the treatments available for it. She quickly decided to forgo Western medicine. The best it had to offer, AZT and painkillers, didn't agree with her system or her system of beliefs.

Friends worried about that. Toward the end of 1989, Marguerite Littman asked William Haseltine, chief of the human-retrovirology division at Harvard's Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, to visit Chow and discuss the medical alternatives. He couldn't change her mind. But he was in good company. "She said the Dalai Lama had also told her to take full

"Part of Tina felt she'd made some wrong choices in her life," says Ghaleb, so she worked them out with herself. "Facing mortality, she was brilliant."

advantage of what Western medicine had to offer," Haseltine recalls. "But she was determined."

For a time, at least, Chow felt she could beat the HIV virus. She fought it with a strict macrobiotic diet of grains, vegetables, and fish. Introduced to the regime by Jürgen Lehl, a designer friend in Tokyo, she started working with several American teachers, ending up with Bill Spear, a macrobiotic counselor who specializes in the emotional aspects of terminal illness.

With him, she delved into her personal problems, too. "Part of Tina felt she'd made some wrong choices in her life," says Ghaleb. Now she looked back at those choices and worked them out with herself, her friends, and family. "Facing mortality, she was brilliant," Ghaleb says. She sought to reconcile her Eastern and Western sides, adds Lynn Nakamura, and "finally came to realize you don't have to be this or that—you can be you, without apologies."

**B**EGINNING IN LATE 1989, she'd told all her friends that she was ill and begun stripping her life of what wasn't essential. Around that time, she called Jun Kanai, an executive at Issey Miyake and co-curator of the Kyoto Costume Institute, and proposed that K.C.I. and New York's Fashion Institute of Technology co-produce an exhibit and publish a catalogue of her clothing collection.

"Because of her new life-style, she wasn't interested in being encumbered with it," says Kanai.

In fits and starts for the next two years, the exhibition, the book, and the donation of a large part of the collection to the two museums were arranged.

F.I.T.'s curators, Richard Martin and Harold Koda, wanted to concentrate on Tina's connoisseurship. She insisted on a more academic approach that highlighted the cut, line, and details of the clothes rather than the woman who'd collected them.

"She wanted the students to see the differences between Dior and Balenciaga," Koda says. At her urging, the patterns for key outfits are illustrated in *Flair*, the forthcoming Rizzoli catalogue.

All through 1990, Tina kept working and traveling. In a burst of creativity, she began designing one-of-a-kind pieces of jewelry with precious metals, creating prototypes for a furniture line, and sculpting with large pieces of stone. But by winter, friends say, she was slowing down.

Then, in March, Tina admitted to Bill Spear that she was scared and lonely. She flew to New York and spent more time with him. At first, she stayed in the 57th Street apartment, but the city was too much for her, so she moved to a serene mountain-view estate in Pound Ridge that she borrowed from Richard Gere (who would later marry model Cindy Crawford). She wasn't driving anymore, so a neighbor of Mark Walsh's would

take her to Connecticut to see Spear and to New York to see friends.

Meanwhile, the jewelry business had fallen into disarray. Because of Tina's perfectionism, it had never made much money. Stock was sitting around in the 57th Street apartment. Finally, a sample sale was held there in the spring, run by Mark Walsh. Tina appeared briefly but quickly retreated to her bedroom, and then back upstairs.

"She looked really bad," says Margaret Salamone, a friend who was there. "She looked scared."

Soon afterward, the opportunistic infections that are the sign of full-blown AIDS began appearing. Tina started losing weight and was having trouble sleeping. So she checked into Beth Israel Medical Center.

There, she met with Brian Saltzman, a doctor friend of Elsa Rady's. "He was just a prince," says Spear. "Respectful, understanding, humorous, professional."

"I was dealing with a woman with strong beliefs," says Saltzman. After meeting with him and Spear in the hospital, Chow agreed to change her diet, and her condition improved. A few days later, Saltzman found her sitting cross-legged in her bed, surrounded by crystals, her pill bottles, her dried locusts, and masses of pink peonies, "radiant, smiling, and impish," he says. "She was so happy we were all trying to work together."

Released from the hospital early in June, Chow flew back to Los Angeles and, says Nadia Ghaleb, had "a pretty good summer." Tina returned to New York briefly that fall for a visit by the Dalai Lama. He arranged a private box outfitted with a mat for her to lie on at his appearance at Madison Square Garden.

"She said if she hadn't come, it would've meant she'd given up," David Seidner says.

After consulting Saltzman and the Dalai Lama's personal physician, Chow returned to Pacific Palisades for the last time. One of her final acts was to lend her name to Tina's House, an AIDS hospice in Mexico to be run by Elena Lopez, the nurse who'd cared for her. By Christmas, she was suffering from toxoplasmosis, a parasitic infection that can lie dormant in the body for years until the immune system can no longer suppress it.

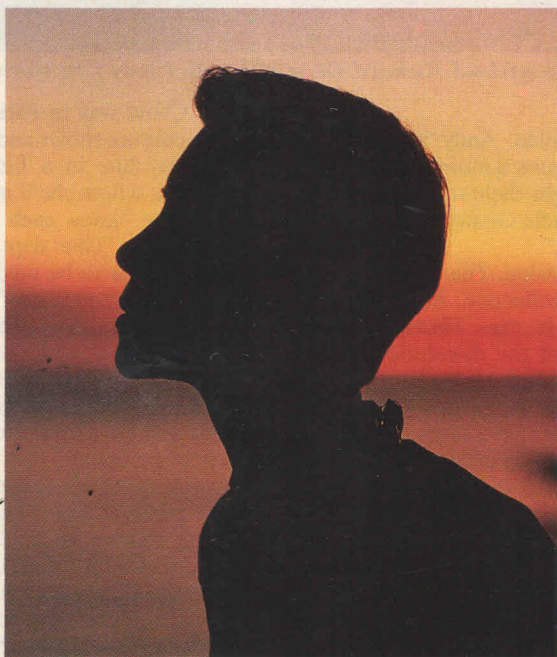
Just before Tina Chow died, her family and friends, who were all by her bedside, thought they saw her mouth moving. Though she hadn't spoken for three weeks, they leaned forward to hear.

"China," Tina seemed to be saying.

China Chow put her head on her mother's heart and hugged her as Tina looked down.

"I love you, Mommy," China Chow whispered. "It's okay. You can go now."

Seconds later, Tina Chow took her last breath. ■



Tina Chow in 1990.