



**INSPIRATION:** Maya Flick has captured Tomasz Starzewski's heart

# Will the miracle Di's frock star

The darling of haute couture is currently helping the handicapped at Lourdes — and talking about sex and a fantastic relationship

**A**S YOU read this, Tomasz Starzewski, frock designer to Princess Di, Joan Collins, Shakira Caine and Baroness Thatcher, is wiping floors, cleaning dishes, cooking meals for 40 people, on two electric rings, and making beds.

The man who normally sports bespoke suits and Thomas Pink shirts is restricted to wearing a black smock uniform. Accustomed to entertaining lavishly, now he is confined, to spending just pennies on guests.

This is the same Tomasz, 36, who last year threw the opulent party of the year at Asprey, his parent company. A shindig at which Michael Schumacher arrived in a gleaming red Ferrari and where Christina Estrada, Sophie Rhys-Jones, the Duke and Duchess of Malborough and Patricia Hodge rubbed Tomasz-tailored shoulders amidst kilometres of swathed red taffeta and red roses.

The same Tomasz, who in February was reported to be about to marry Maya Flick, sister of Princess Gloria von Thurn und Taxis and former wife of Mick, the stratospherically wealthy Mercedes Benz heir.

"It wasn't a great romantic thing, a ring inside an ice cube or anything. It was just a case of them deciding it would be fun to get married," said Tomasz's spokesman Hicky Taylor at the time, adding that they'd set aside a day in July to marry.

We meet in his Sloane Street shop. "Should I get the jacket short or long, Tomasz?" asks Alyce Faye, wife of John Cleese, standing next to a supermodel assistant.

The comedians Hale and Pace are also working as Tomasz's assistants for six months, making a one-hour BBC documentary and designing Starzewski-style outfits. Tomasz has challenged them to make counterfeits so classy that they will not only glide along the catwalk to

rapturous applause at his September fashion show but also sell.

Tomasz has a round, clever face with Austrian horn-rimmed spectacles and a dumpy figure. Nearby, women who lunch on lettuce, an A-Z of London society, browse through clothes big on ornamentation, buttons, embroidery and fabric. Thank God the slippery, naked, pre-pubescent look is on its way out. Next season, fashion will be about power suits, snappy colours, Dynasty shoulders and an Eighties revival.

But right now, Tomasz is in Lourdes. This is his fourth year of cooking for the 10 physically handicapped malades (as the sick are called) and 30 volunteers. Tomasz meets the malades in Paris and travels overnight by train, washing the sick and helping them

**The  
Caroline  
Phillips**

*Interview*



**Tomasz Starzewski**  
FASHION DESIGNER

the tawdry Lourdes shops with souvenir Virgin Marys and plastic bottles for healing water. But soon he felt touched by the power of faith and the nightly candlelit processions with thousands upon thousands of people, some on stretchers, some in wheelchairs, all praying.

"I'm very spoilt," admits Tomasz, who speaks with a Kensington accent. "It's uplifting and makes me forget my own problems. Most of our malades have never even been out of their villages and this is the only holiday of their lives."

He remembers the poignant malade in his 20s who was training for the Olympics and broke his neck. "He was an inspiration, able still to have enormous fun. Nothing daunted him. He's now in the handicapped Olympics and has girls running

after him." And the sophisticated, bright priest who went through a wind-screen, can no longer move, yet retains total, unquestioning belief.

Last year, Tomasz met a woman who

experienced a miracle just after the war, one of only 65 recorded, and who was cured from a vegetative state and terminal illness.

But enough of that. What about his marriage to the delectable Maya? Now aged 38, she separated from Mick in 1994, walking off with a cool £9 million divorce settlement which the High Court has given her leave to challenge. "She's got me hooked. She's one of the most wonderful,

**'She's got me hooked. She's one of the most extraordinary people I've ever met'**

into bunks, all crammed together in a sleeper.

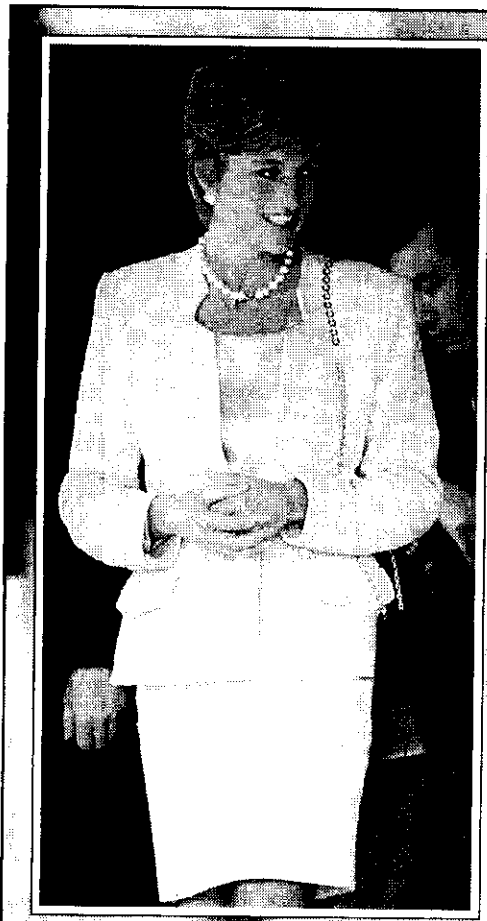
In Lourdes he works in a hospice, a panting three-flight walk to a ward cramped with malades, helpers, guests, beds and cooking utensils. His budget is 20 francs (just over £2) per head per day for food.

Last year millionaire Maya Flick was going to work as his assistant — she has been before with the Austrians — but was unable to go at the last minute.

Tomasz was struck by



# Will marry Maya?



**POLE POSITION:** Princess Diana is among the rich and famous who beat a path to Tomasz Starzewski's door to wear his creations

inspiring, extraordinary people I've ever met," says Tomasz, talking about the reports of a proposed marriage for the first time. "We share the same mischievousness and have lots in common."

**S**O ARE they going to marry? "Marriage is not something I will discuss," he says, definitely. Well does he agree with newspaper columnist Taki who, on hearing the news, said Tomasz was a confirmed bachelor and not the marrying kind? "What on earth is a confirmed bachelor?" retorts Tomasz. "The problem is that as I get older I get more selfish and it becomes harder to commit." Yes, yes, but is Tomasz marrying Maya? He lights a Dunhill menthol but says nothing.

When Tomasz was 17 years old, he was told by a fortune teller that he'd be married by the time he was 40. "I've never questioned that. I realised last year that I wanted to marry. I can't imagine remaining single. It's not essential for me to have

children. But I don't mind marrying someone who already has them." He pauses, while I recall that Maya has three children. "I believe in marriage as a sacrament. It's for life."

The subject of Tomasz and sex is interesting. He has never lived with anybody. In 1993 he told me that the price of his career had been solitude: that he'd been celibate for eight years. "I haven't been celibate for the last four years," he says, now. "It ended when I met someone in Poland late in 1993." He refuses to elaborate.

He had non-committal relationships in his 20s, but not one-night stands. "I've never understood the thrill of having sex with a stranger. What do you talk about?" he laughs. "I'm old fashioned. If you're giving part of your body, you're also giving part of your soul and it should mean something."

Tomasz had a strict, moral upbringing. The son of Polish refugees,

his father Wojtek, was an architect and his mother Maria, a dressmaker. As children, his parents were incarcerated in concentration camps in Siberia. Freed in 1941, they escaped via Tehran to Palestine then Britain.

**'In a crisis, I eat. Inside my roly-poly body an anorexic is fighting to get out'**

"I had a formal upbringing, he says. To this day, I'd never address my parents' friends by their Christian names. I was the product of parents who didn't have a childhood in any meaningful sense of the word. I was raised to understand survival."

His parents had starved, so food assumed an important role at home. "They wouldn't throw away even a crust of bread." Emphasis was also placed on a strict education. Tomasz went

to Emanuel, a private London school, and had further tutoring at home every night and Saturday. His dyslexia wasn't recognised at school. "Reading and writing aren't easy for me. If you put a sheet of paper in

front of me, I still freeze and panic." (He transposed letters constantly, so that his childhood nickname became MOT.)

His mother contracted tuberculosis when Tomasz was seven years old. "She was put on severe medication and was in terrible pain," he says. "She was plagued with ill health thereafter. I learned to cook and do things for myself. It made me grow up quickly and become very serious. I felt responsible for her."

His brother Mark (now a printer) was a troublemaker. "I was intimidated by him. But his reputation protected me at school." The brothers were born on the same date, one premature, the

other late, four years apart; but they were bought up only to celebrate their name days. "I've never known my brother very well," says Tomasz. "We're all very private. When someone is ill at home and people have gone through terrible things, you learn to be closed."

Tomasz uses food to cope. "My weight is a continual problem," he exhales. "I've spent since the age of 16 crash dieting and bingeing, going up and down like a yo-yo. If I have a crisis, I eat. Inside this roly-poly body, there's an anorexic fighting to get out." He smiles.

Tomasz is charming, judgmental and funny. Sophisticated, cultured, inquisitive and gossipy. He is split: he is a serious, moral man who is also impishly childlike in his humour.

A man who straddles two cultures (he speaks Polish with his parents). And one who, interestingly, even sees his destiny as two parallel roads which he has the free will to select. So will he marry Maya?