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Lagerfeld takes "Beautiful Fall" author to court - Style & Design - International Herald Tribune

By SUZY MENKES NOV. 11, 2006

PARIS — IN an unusual move by a celebrity fashion designer, Karl Lagerfeld has started legal action in the French courts, requesting damages for intrusion into his private life.

A court decision is expected Jan. 15 at the Palais de Justice as to whether "The Beautiful Fall," by the British-born, Paris-based journalist Alicia Drake, is guilty of invasion of privacy in a country with strong legal protection for private life.

The book is a study of Paris fashion in the 1970s and in particular the rivalry between its two star designers of the period, Lagerfeld and Yves Saint Laurent.

It includes discussions of homosexuality and drug-fueled parties, although not necessarily implicating Lagerfeld himself.

Discussing such subjects, even when the events took place 30 years ago, could be seen as invasion of privacy under French law.

Two court sessions have already been held, on Nov. 13 and 20 at the Tribunal de Grande Instance. Lagerfeld's claim was for an "atteinte à la vie privée" (breach of privacy) set out in Article 9 of the French Civil Code.

The plaintiff altered his demands for damages between the two hearings, according to legal information made available to the International Herald Tribune. The sessions were open to the public.

Lagerfeld complained openly on the book's publication in September that passages supposedly revealing his real age as 73 and discussing his German background were built on unreliable family sources.

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France. Three Paris bookshops — Brentano, Galignani and WH Smith — confirmed Monday that they had stopped selling the book.

Alicia Drake, reached at her Paris home on Monday, replied: "no comment."

Her lawyer, registered in the case as Maître Marie-Avril Roux, confirmed Monday that two audiences had been held in November in the Paris tribunal's 17th chamber, which specializes in privacy cases, that there was no claim of libel, that damages were discussed and that the judge's verdict would be given in January.

She added that there was currently no formal legal injunction forbidding the sale of the book in France.

Lagerfeld's lawyer, Maître Céline Degoulet, confirmed the January judgment and said that from her point of view, the case had already achieved its major goal: the book has been voluntarily withdrawn from France. Lagerfeld himself was not available for comment before press deadlines.

Pierre Bergé, the partner of Saint Laurent, whose personal life is also discussed in the book, said on Monday that he had no intention of going to court.

"I would never do a legal procedure — it is not worth it," he said in a telephone interview.

"The comments in the book are not so grave," he added. "I don't find it all that bad. It would have had to have been an attack on the person and character of Yves Saint Laurent. There is a lot of complicity between designers and the press, but we must leave writers some space and freedom and not tie their hands."

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