

# Telegraph Magazine

## Flashback

### Designer Elizabeth Emanuel recalls the last time she worked with Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1986



Elizabeth Emanuel with Diana, Princess of Wales at Kensington Palace

AFTER MY THEN husband David and I made Diana, Princess of Wales's wedding dress in 1981, we carried on working with her and created lots of outfits. But in 1986, it had suddenly gone very quiet. Diana was developing her own style and visiting other designers, so she hadn't been seen in our clothes for a long time. The press started speculating that we were out of favour and there was suddenly a lot of talk about us.

In the beginning, we thought it was perfectly reasonable that she wanted to try other labels – that's just what happens. But it went on for such a long time with the press saying, 'Diana's not wearing the Emanuels' clothes any more, what's going on?' We were being hassled a lot and eventually it really troubled me. I thought, 'Maybe we've upset her, maybe they're right and she doesn't like us any more or she's fed up with our clothes.'

It got to the point that I spoke to my dad about it. I felt terrible in case we'd made a mistake or let her down somehow. I actually began to feel ill about it. She was such an important part of our life. If we had upset her it would have been mortifying. We just wanted to know everything was OK. So in the end I asked my dad to write to her private secretary.

Within a day or so, Diana called us up. She had heard that we were worried and wanted to reassure us. Then she said, 'By the way, I've got a tour of the Middle East coming up and I wanted to ask if you could make some clothes for me.' Despite all the other labels she'd tried, I think she still loved our clothes.

She invited us to Kensington Palace to talk through ideas. Then she said, 'Also, I'm being photographed by Tim Graham. It's quite a big thing and I'd love you to be part of it.' Although you can't see David in this picture, we both ended up in a photo that was first published in Tim's book *In Private – In Public: The Prince and Princess of Wales*.

It was always very relaxed with Diana. I drew so many designs for that meeting, it was a bit like when we worked on her wedding dress. There were too many sketches to go on a table, so we

**It was always very relaxed with Diana. There were too many sketches to go on a table, so we just sat on the floor**

just sat on the floor with all the fabric samples. We ended up doing a lot of outfits for the Middle East tour, probably eight or nine, and you can see some of the patterns we used in this shot. We had a list of instructions about what she would be doing and the customs in each area. It was like old times with her.

It was quite a treat to go to the Palace, as Diana usually visited us at our Brook Street atelier. It felt very cosy and relaxed. As you entered the apartment, the first thing you saw on the stairs was a giant portrait of her in her wedding dress. It was beautiful, all ruffles and lace.

By this point, she had become so much more confident than when we first met her as a girl who had never had to dress up for anything. As time went by, she really got into the swing of things and recognised what looked good on her. She became one of the most stylish women in the world.

Soon after this photograph was taken, David and I split up and the company was disbanded. That tour was the last time that we dressed her. It was so sweet of her to have done that for us.

— Interview by Bethan Holt