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This file photo taken on July 21, 1998 shows Japanese designer Hanae Mori being applauded by her models at the end of her 1998/99 Fall/Winter haute couture collection in Paris.



This photo shows late Japanese designer Hanae Mori in Tokyo.



This file photo taken on January 21, 1997 shows Japanese designer Hanae Mori (left) receiving a lily from the model displaying her wedding dress in Paris after the presentation of her spring/summer haute couture collections. — AFP photos

Hanae Mori: Grande dame of Japanese fashion

Japanese designer Hanae Mori, who cracked the Parisian haute couture world and was dubbed "Madame Butterfly" for her signature motif, has died in Tokyo aged 96, her office told AFP. Over the decades Mori's luxurious creations were worn by Nancy Reagan, Grace Kelly and countless members of high society.

But she was also a pioneer for Japanese women, one of a tiny number to head an international corporation. An employee at Mori's office said Thursday that she died at home "of old age" on August 11, and that a private funeral had taken place. The designer's trailblazing career took her from Tokyo, where she started out making costumes for cinema, to New York and Paris—and in 1977 her label became the first Asian fashion house to join the rarefied ranks of haute couture.

The exclusive French club sets exacting standards for their hand-crafted, and extremely expensive, garments. "When humans work with their hands, their creativity expands," Mori told AFP during a 2006 retrospective in Tokyo, where a robot modelled a replica of her classic "Chrysanthemum Pyjamas"—a kimono-like robe made from hot-pink chiffon and silk.

In January, the designer summed up her feelings toward the industry in a special column for Japan's Yomiuri Shimbun

daily. "Fashion is something that pushes you, gives you courage to spread your wings and allows you to have adventures," she said.

Encounter with Chanel

Born in 1926 in a rural corner of western Japan, Mori studied literature at Tokyo Women's Christian University before turning her hand to design. She opened her first atelier above a noodle shop in Tokyo, and came to specialize in dressing the stars of the silver screen. As Japan's postwar economy grew, so did her business, which she ran with her husband—a textile executive who encouraged her to visit Paris and New York when the arrival of television made the film industry less profitable.

"This was a kind of turning point for me," she once said of the trips in the early 1960s, during which she met Coco Chanel in Paris. It turned out to be an inspirational encounter. When she stepped into Chanel's studio the iconic designer suggested she wear something in bright orange to contrast with her black hair. Taken aback, it got Mori thinking.

"The whole Japanese concept of beauty is based on concealment... I suddenly realized that I should change my approach and make my dresses help a woman stand out," she said, according to the Washington Post.



This file photo taken on July 7, 2004 shows Japanese designer Hanae Mori (centre right) walking on the catwalk after the presentation of her autumn-winter 2004-05 haute couture collection in Paris.

'East Meets West'

In 1965, Mori unveiled her first collection abroad, in New York, under the theme "East Meets West". Her designs combined traditional patterns like cranes and cherry blossoms—and her trademark butterflies—with Western styles, from woollen suits to sharp satin tailoring. Mori moved her brand from Tokyo to Paris in the late 1970s and was quickly embraced by fashion insiders.

She saw a distinction between herself

and her Japanese peers who later made a global name for themselves—such as Issey Miyake, Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons fame. "The young Japanese designers who live in Paris are passionately avant-garde," she told the Washington Post. "I am not. I love to follow the traditional way."

Mori built her brand into a business empire, which in its heyday occupied a whole building in Tokyo designed by the architect Kenzo Tange—later torn down

and replaced with another structure at typical Japanese speed. From the loss of the building to the retirement of her fashion house from haute couture, "not everything was positive", she reflected in her Yomiuri column. "It was like my butterfly wings were torn off. But this butterfly was able to fly all over the world for 70 years, because I loved making clothes."

'Wanted to be different'

Mori designed the gown worn by princess Masako—now empress—at her 1993 wedding, as well as uniforms for Japan Airlines flight attendants. And in 1985, she created stage costumes for, appropriately, "Madame Butterfly" performed at La Scala in Milan. But with growing losses in the early 2000s, her empire was largely sold off and she shuttered her Paris atelier in 2004 after her last couture show there. Hanae Mori boutiques remain open in Tokyo and her fragrances are still sold worldwide.

As a powerful businesswoman, Mori was a rarity in Japan, where boardrooms are still heavily male-dominated. Speaking of her early married life, she once remarked that she was never invited out with her husband's friends. At that time "Japan was a gentlemen's country", she said, but "I wanted to be different". — AFP

Enrique Galan is seldom happier than when he disappears deep into the Everglades to hunt down Burmese pythons, an invasive species that has been damaging Florida's wetland ecosystem for decades. When not working at his job staging cultural events in Miami, the 34-year-old spends his time tracking down the nocturnal reptiles from Southeast Asia.

He does so as a professional hunter, hired by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to help control the python population, estimated to be in the tens of thousands. At night, Galan drives slowly for miles on paved roads and gravel tracks, his flashlight playing on grassy verges and tree roots, and the banks of waterways where alligator eyes occasionally glint.

He charges \$13 an hour and an additional fee per python found: \$50 if it's up to four feet (1.2 meters), and \$25 more for each additional foot. But on this August night, he has an extra motivation.

The FWC has been holding a 10-day python-hunting contest, with 800 people participating. The prize is \$2,500 for whoever finds and kills the most pythons in each of the categories—professional and amateur hunter. And Galan would love to win that money to celebrate the arrival of Jesus, his newborn baby.

Pets released into wild

Burmese pythons, originally brought to the United States as pets, have become a threat to the Everglades since humans released them into the wild in the late 1970s. The snake has no natural predators, and feeds on other reptiles, birds, and mammals such as raccoons and white-tailed deer. "They're an amazing predator," says Galan in admiration.

Specimens in the Everglades average between six and nine feet long, but finding them at night in the wetland of more than 1.5 million acres (607,000 hectares)

Hunting pythons in Florida, for profit and therapy

A professional python hunter, hired by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Enrique Galan catches a Burmese python, in Everglades National Park, Florida. — AFP photos

takes skill and patience. Galan has a trained eye, as well as the courage and determination needed for the job. After two unsuccessful nights, he spots a shadow on the shoulder of Highway 41: he jumps out of his truck and lunges at the animal, a baby Burmese python.

Grabbing it behind the head to avoid being bitten, he puts it in a cloth bag and ties it with a knot. He will kill it hours later with a BB gun. A few miles further on, a huge python slithers across the tarmac. Galan again bolts from his truck but this time the snake escapes into the grass, leaving behind a strong musky scent, a

defense mechanism.

Therapy for some

Galan took an online training course before hunting pythons, but says he learned everything he knows from Tom Rahill, a 65-year-old who founded the Swamp Apes association 15 years ago to help war veterans deal with traumatic memories through python hunting. For a few hours, Rahm Levinson, an Iraq war veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, hunts with Rahill and Galan. "It really helped me through a lot of stuff struggling at home," he said.

"I can't sleep at night and having someone to go out at 12 o'clock, two o'clock in the morning, and catch pythons is something productive and good." Galan is proud to participate in a project that has eliminated more than 17,000 pythons since 2000. "One of the best things that I get out of it is the amount of beauty that I'm just surrounded by. If you just look closely, open your eyes and observe, you'll see a lot of magic here." — AFP

Climate change causes wonky bumblebee wings

Warmer and wetter weather linked to climate change appears to stress out bumblebees and make their wings more asymmetrical, which could ultimately affect their future development, according to UK scientists in a new research paper. "With hotter and wetter conditions predicted to place bumblebees under higher stress, the fact these conditions will become more frequent under climate change means bumblebees may be in for a rough time over the 21st century," scientists at Imperial College, London, wrote in the Animal Ecology journal on Wednesday.

The large furry bees, known for their distinctive buzz, only feed on flowers, making them vulnerable to changes to the countryside due to intensive farming. Their population has declined in Britain over the past century, with two species becoming extinct, according to the Bumblebee Conservation Trust.

The Imperial College scientists looked at more than 6,000 bumblebee specimens in natural history museums, collected across Britain during the 20th century. The scientists examined the right-left symmetry between the bees' four wings, because asymmetry is an indication that the insect experienced stress during development.

They found that bees from the second half of the 20th century consistently had a higher average rate of asymmetry. Asymmetry was also "consistently higher in warmer and wetter years," according to the paper's senior co-author Richard Gill.

"Overall, these results could suggest bumblebees experienced increasing stress as the century progressed and that aspects of climate change could have contributed to this trend," the paper said. The weather conditions linked to wonky wings "will likely increase in frequency with climate change", it continued.

In April, scientists in the United States who studied more than 20,000 bees in the Rocky Mountains found that bumblebees had lower heat tolerance than smaller bees and were "more threatened under climate warming than other bees". Insects are facing a huge impact from both warming climate and intensive agriculture. Another study released in April in the journal Nature found that these factors cause insect populations to plummet by nearly half compared to areas less affected by temperature rises and industrial farming. — AFP



A professional python hunter, hired by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Tom Rahill catches a Florida native water snake as he searches for Burmese pythons, in Everglades National Park, Florida.



Tom Rahill catches a lizard as he searches for Burmese pythons, in Everglades National Park, Florida.



Enrique Galan catches a Burmese python, in Everglades National Park, Florida.