

The Week



HATS OFF A chic bio pays homage to Halston, here with Virna Lisi in '64

Nonfiction

HALSTON: AN AMERICAN ORIGINAL **Elaine Gross and Fred Rottman**

(HarperCollins, \$50) Born Roy Halston Frowick in Iowa (where he made his first outfit with chicken feathers at age 6), Halston may be best remembered as a fixture at Studio 54, often accompanied by pal Liza Minnelli. But this gorgeous coffee-table tribute makes a convincing case that his clean, modern designs “put American fashion on the map.” He initially gained attention for his hats, including the pillbox Jackie Kennedy wore at JFK’s inaugural. And in 1968 he started his own clothing line, revolutionizing fashion with stylish ready-to-wear collections. After a perusal of the glamorous images in Gross and Rottman’s respectful biography, you’ll surely agree that Halston’s death from AIDS in 1990 left the fashion world a much less colorful place. **A-** —William Stevenson

icality was unavoidable for the athletic Williams, who as a sexually abused teen found safety in swimming. Forthright and affably ribald, *Mermaid* details her harrowing experiences (usually under the direction of Busby Berkeley) as a human commodity at MGM, where her intelligence navigating the choppy seas of stardom made her a true champion. **B+** —Charles Winecoff

Fiction

A GESTURE LIFE Chang-rae Lee

(Riverhead, \$23.95) In his small New York town, Doc Hata is known for his consideration, his manners, and his beautiful house (and, though it is never overtly stated, for being Japanese). When his estranged adopted daughter returns to a nearby town with her son, Hata’s desire to untangle their relationship leads him to examine his own past, chiefly his stint as a medic in a Japanese battalion during World War II. There he was