

Oleg Cassini

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The greatest disaster of his movie career came when he had the chance to create a dance dress for Rita Hayworth in "Tales of Manhattan." He designed a white chiffon dress with two bands of chiffon crossing over the bodice, one purple, the other light blue. When Rita got in front of the camera, the purple was so dark that it vanished, making her look as though she had lost half her bosom. It, and Cassini, were promptly thrown out of the picture.

Born in Paris, Oleg Cassini was educated in Italy; his mother is Russian refugee Countess Marguerite Cassini, who had a design studio in Florence when her sons were going to school, and his brother is Igor Cassini, who writes a syndicated newspaper-society column.

Oleg studied law, was an ardent amateur painter, and as a young boy paid for trips to Paris by making sketches of the collections for his mother.

He Becomes a Hollywood Designer

In 1936, fascism drove them to take refuge in America. For two years, he had a design studio in New York, doing custom work for the society women he had met abroad. Then, in 1938, he went to Hollywood, where he worked for both Paramount and 20th Century-Fox, and married the lovely Gene Tierney. Although they have been divorced 10 years, and their 12-year-old daughter Tina, now lives with her father, he continues to design clothes for his ex-wife, now remarried, and they are good friends.

Their marriage foundered on their long separation during the war (he was in the cavalry, going in a private, rising to captain), his impatience with Hollywood when he came out of the Army ("They gave me a horse opera named 'Green Grass of Wyoming' as my first job. I told them I'd spent four and a half years with horses, and I didn't know why I had to come back and design blankets for horses in the movies"), his desire to move back to New York, and Gene's determination to stay in Hollywood for the sake of her career.

In June, 1950, he opened his own business in New York, which included both custom-made clothes for individual customers and a commercial line of ready-made Oleg Cassini clothes which are sold in stores all over the United States starting at \$90. He had immediate success.

"To be really elegant, you need monastic dignity," Cassini advises women. "I think if there is one piece of advice I would readily give to women in general, it's be simple; take off accessories and bows instead of adding them."

"The second is to study yourself, know what is right and what is wrong for your particular type. Then, when buying clothes, use a selective attitude. Don't let salespeople bully you into taking something which isn't right. In this way, you will find

yourself achieving what should be every woman's goal, a style of her own which pays no attention to fad."

Jacqueline Kennedy usually wore clothes made by French designers, notably Givenchy and Balenciaga, before she selected Cassini to do her wardrobe. Her decision to buy American clothes was in line with the whole "buy American" trend on the New Frontier.

Won't Follow Paris Fashions

Cassini had never made clothes for her before, and only occasionally for Mrs. Joseph Kennedy and the Kennedy sisters. He had known Jacqueline socially and understood the kind of life she lives, but that is not what admirers of Cassini find significant in her final decision. He has been one of the few American designers who have refused to follow the trend of hurrying to Paris for the openings there, and letting them supply inspiration for their clothes. "I go to Europe for the skiing," he says, "not to copy somebody else's ideas."

"We have allowed the French couture to take the leadership too long," he says. "We haven't tried to be original in spirit; we have simply picked their brains, adapting their ideas, sometimes copying their individual dresses with hardly any changes."

"That is why many deeply fashion-conscious women go to the great dressmakers of Paris and buy their clothes. These originals are beautiful, always exquisitely fitted. But for the woman who can't afford the originals, the French copies, the ones they are sending to us for the mass market, are cheap, badly made, shoddy merchandise. A woman who wants her money's worth is much better off buying well-made American clothes."

Cassini adds: "I do not propose to tell Mrs. Kennedy what to wear; and I do not believe she plans to tell me what to design. Our relationship will be one in which I propose and she disposes. Thus it is necessary for me to be familiar with both the woman and the world in which she moves."

Jacqueline Shines at Inaugural

One of the major impacts he made on fashion was when he designed Mrs. Kennedy's fawn beige costume for Inauguration Day. While nearly every other woman on television was bundled in fur, Mrs. Kennedy's coat, with its discreet flare, its sable muff, and its daringly modest circlet of sable at the throat, was sensational. It was also the result of Cassini's long experience in designing for the camera, the cruel camera which seems to add about 10 pounds to a woman's weight unless she is dressed properly for it. The women who wore luxurious minks and chinchillas looked bulky. The First Lady was slim, lovely, everything pointing toward her beautiful face.

The fur industry may hate Cassini for what he did, but he is prepared for the bitterness of competitors who have tasted deep of the sour grapes. Says he:

"It's easy to be very considerate and kind when you are a success. The trick is to be arrogant when things are going badly."



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