

BY MICHAEL SHULMAN

Sartorially Speaking

Oscar de la Renta Turns Wynn Las Vegas Into His Latest Runway

Las Vegas are in for a special treat on May 22nd, when Neiman Marcus presents the latest collection from Oscar de la Renta at Wynn Las Vegas. It's happening at the annual luncheon/fashion show to benefit the Nathan Adelson Hospice, Southern Nevada's only nonprofit hospice program providing quality care and compassionate support to patients and families, regardless of insurance or ability to pay.

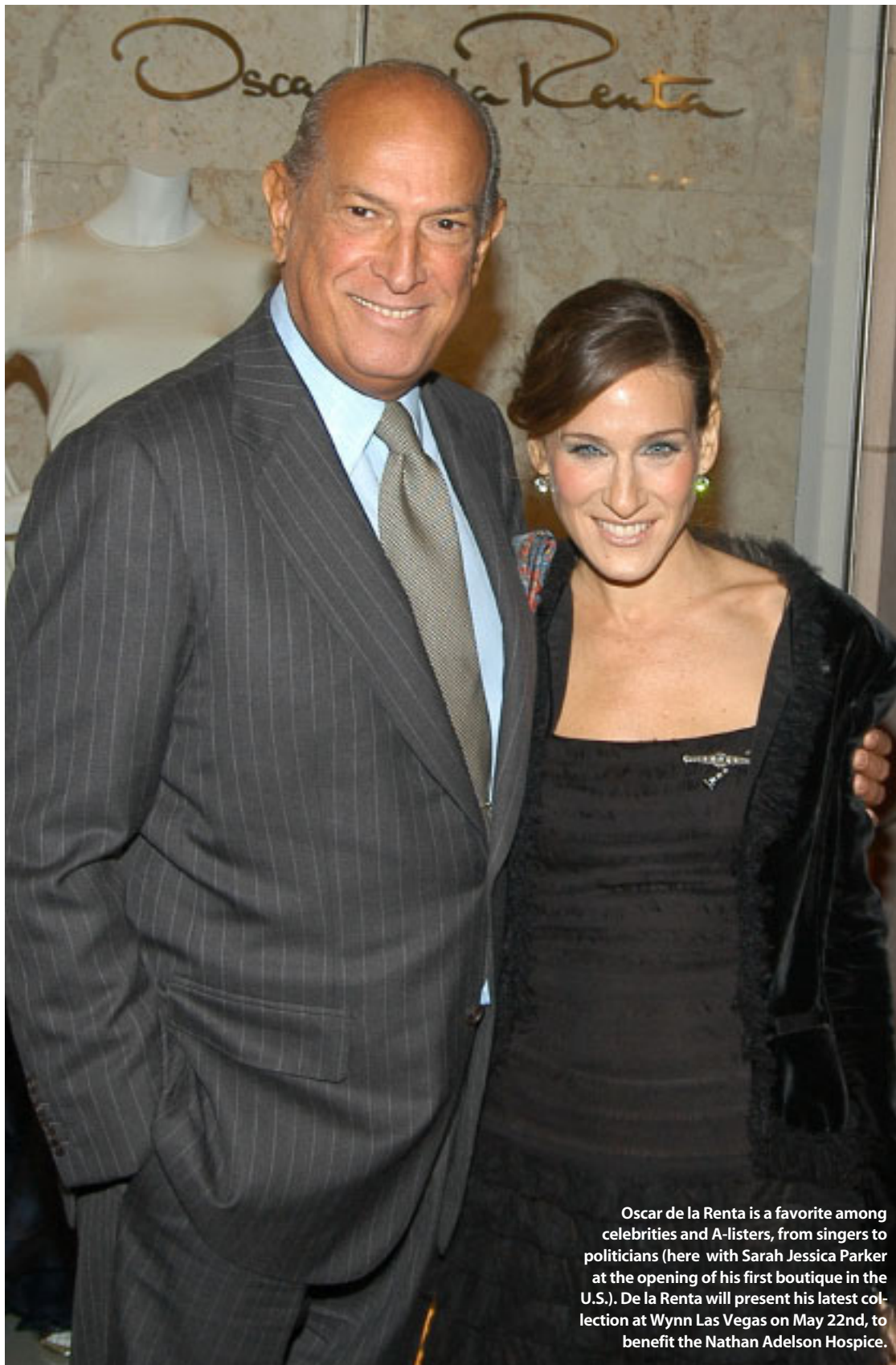
Before launching his eponymous collection in 1965, Oscar de la Renta worked in varying capacities for some of the most iconic names in fashion history, including Cristóbal Balenciaga, Antonio Castillo at Lanvin, and Elizabeth Arden. Today, he remains a favorite among stylists (Patricia Field dressed Sarah Jessica Parker in his designs on *Sex and the City*), socialites (Aerin Lauder Zinterhofer loves his sleek and elegant gowns) and ladies from states both red and blue (First Lady Laura Bush and Senator Hillary Clinton enjoy the sartorial savvy of his smart suits). Here, Vegas' Michael Shulman speaks with America's emperor of elegant embroidery.

VEGAS: What are the major changes you have seen in the fashion business in the more than half-century you've been working?

OSCAR DE LA RENTA: Fashion is always a reflection of the times. What is exciting about fashion today, though, is that never in our history has a woman had as much control over her destiny as she does today. When I first started designing, a woman went to the store to buy a dress. She saw it in pink and red, and loved the red but remembered that her husband, who is probably going to pay for the dress, loves pink. So she bought that one. Today, the same woman goes to the store and remembers that her husband likes the pink, but buys the red.

Some of the greatest visionaries and editors of contemporary fashion have advised you throughout your career: You were a protégée of Baron Nicolas Louis Alexandre de Gunzburg, a rare distinction shared only by Bill Blass and Calvin Klein; you received vocational advice from no less a personage than the legendary Diana Vreeland, who advised you to pass on a job with Christian Dior in favor of designing a collection for Elizabeth Arden, saying you would more speedily make a name for yourself with Arden whereas you would 'always be eclipsed by the name of Dior.' Even your first wife, the late society hostess and decorator Françoise de Langlade, had served as editor in chief of

“Never in our history has a woman had as much control over her destiny.”



Oscar de la Renta is a favorite among celebrities and A-listers, from singers to politicians (here with Sarah Jessica Parker at the opening of his first boutique in the U.S.). De la Renta will present his latest collection at Wynn Las Vegas on May 22nd, to benefit the Nathan Adelson Hospice.

JAMIE MCCARTHY/WIREIMAGE.COM

OSCAR DE LA RENTA



From left: With Audrey Hepburn at an event honoring designer Hubert de Givenchy, 1988; a model walking the runway in a gown from Oscar de la Renta's spring 2008 collection during Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week.

“I try to incorporate beautiful craftsmanship and luxurious details into my designs.”

French *Vogue*. Who are some of the other great voices by which you have been guided?

In addition to those you have named above—all of whom were essential to me along the way—my wife, Annette, who shares my love of children, family and helping others. Also, my children and their families.

The first thing that comes to my mind when I think ‘Oscar de la Renta’ is continental flair with a bit of sophisticated flounce and just a soupçon of flamenco seasoning. How would you describe the de la Renta look?

I would add that I try to incorporate a strong sense of ornamentation, beautiful craftsmanship, and luxurious details into my designs.

Your body of work is overwhelming—everything from evening gowns and eyeglasses to furniture and furs. In the ‘80s you donated your time to give the Boy Scouts of America uniforms a much needed update, and in 1993 you became the first Dominican (and only the second American) to helm a French couture house, at Pierre Balmain. Which projects and collec-

tions were the most exciting, challenging or rewarding to undertake?

My first collection was of course very challenging, but it was well received by the stores, which in turn made it one of the most rewarding. Couture is, in itself, exciting, challenging and rewarding—in that order.

Your shows in Bryant Park are always a highlight of New York Fashion Week. In retrospect, do any collections in particular immediately come to mind as favorites?

There have been far too many to name just one, but in addition to my own collections, the decade of collections I created for Balmain were certainly

Neiman Marcus presents the Fall 2008 collection from Oscar de la Renta benefiting the Nathan Adelson Hospice on Thursday, May 22nd, at Wynn Las Vegas. For more information, call 702-938-3910. Seating is limited.

among my favorites.

What have been your greatest sources of inspiration?

My greatest source of inspiration has been the woman. My designs are a celebration of her sense of femininity. Specific places and things that have provided me with inspiration include the belle époque, gypsies, abstract art of the late 20th century, the Far East, Iran and Morocco.

Does something in particular make the Las Vegas customer stand out from clients elsewhere?

Las Vegas is one of the most lavish and colorful resort cities in the world. Our customers there are equally vibrant, global and stylish.

You are one of the most elegant individuals I’ve had the pleasure of meeting. What’s your secret? Do you have a favorite accessory?

I always try to look my best and suppose that I dress somewhat conservatively. I’m pleased to see that the pocket square is enjoying a renaissance. I enjoy linen while in the tropics, and a favorite luxury of mine is wearing custom-tailored suits.

What do you do to relax? What are your favorite travel destinations?

When I am not in my studio designing, I consider Punta Cana in my native Dominican Republic to be the ultimate retreat. I love to be outside working in my gardens or playing a competitive game of dominos.

Finally, what advice do you have for young designers?

Don’t run before you can walk. The pace of the fashion industry is so much faster now—take the time to get out there and learn about your customer. ♠