

FASHION DESIGNER



DICK DU PUIS



Chapter 13

FASHION DESIGN CAREER

Philippians 2: 2-4

Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

INTEGRITY

The American College Dictionary defines integrity using words such as soundness of moral principle and character, honesty, state of being whole, entire, or undiminished, sound, and unimpaired. Obviously, in order to be known by those around us as being a person of integrity, we must consistently live from the inside-out, rather than from the outside-in; a journey where purity of heart is an absolute. It's being in the world but not of it and counting others as being more significant than self. It's demonstrating these beliefs through the consistency of our walk and talk; wearing it like a necessary basic garment; a cloak of protection wrapped firmly around our being no matter the situation.

Unfortunately, in the world where achievement and status are defined by the recognition from man rather than God, the path to success is littered with the bruised and battered souls of others. Yet, when reflecting back on that journey, we may see as one of the wounded, our own soul that is beyond our recognition due to being so diminished and broken. Rather than having worn the basic garment whose fibers consisted of soundness of moral principles and character, we found ourselves making so many frequent costume changes while climbing the ladder of success, the result was our own self destruction and emptiness. Additionally, the most extreme sadness in the whole picture may be our inability to recognize our broken state because of a calloused heart.

WORLD OF FASHION

The world in which Dick Du Puis found himself as a women's clothing designer has been described by many as brutal, cut-throat and stunningly carnal in every aspect. After all, his assignment as a designer was focused on decorating the exterior of a woman with the latest, most beautiful covering available in society. It meant staying ahead of the curve in order to soar head and shoulders above the competition. Vision in predicting what fashion costumes would turn the heads of women meant success or failure; the focus on every mind of the designer and company owner.

Consequently, in this environment where making a good impression was paramount, selfish ambition or vain conceit could easily take root in the designer's heart; especially if the philosophy of the company's owner was of like mind.

Unfortunately, for Dick Du Puis, this was the environment in which he found himself as a fashion designer of women's clothing throughout his stay. In order for him to follow his lifelong dream as a designer, it would be necessary to quickly learn how to keep his footing in a fast paced world that differed so greatly from his childhood as a Gueydan, Louisiana boy. As he began this perilous journey, he might be compared to the shepherd boy David taking on the mighty Goliath; in an industry that possessed the teeth to eat the innocent beginner.

DICK'S MOTIVATION

Fortunately, the young boy calling himself Dick Du Puis who had faced so many hardships growing up, quickly accessed each step he took with such clarity that he was able to walk the path of his dream using grit, creativity and determination well beyond his years.

Repeatedly, as he told the story of his life to the writer, the description of the elegant gowns he designed always centered on the women who would wear them. He would tell how the fabric would swish and sway as the client sashayed across the room. Sometimes, he would draw a sketch showing the effect of the neckline upon her countenance. Above all, Dick took into consideration that God had made each woman with such uniqueness that his clothing creations were to honor and respect her attributes.

Therefore, as Dick worked as a designer for the major manufactures of women's clothing in Los Angeles, you will be amazed at how savvy and advanced he was in determining style and direction for each season. Every garment was completed to perfection, even if he had to overcome numerous obstacles all by himself. That is why, even at age 80, he is adamant about a designer possessing the ability to sew. He firmly believes it is critical for the designer to not only be talented at sketching, but have the ability to control the product in all stages

until its completion. This requires a designer to not only understand each step in the process, but also apply a broad skill base to assure success.

CAREER PATH

Don Miguel—a designer couture house in Los Angeles

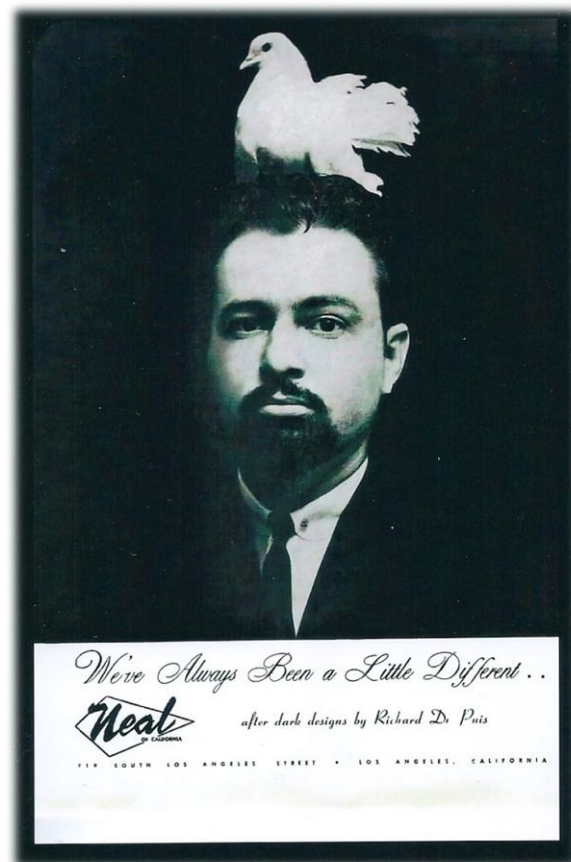


(PHOTOGRAPH WAS TAKEN OF DICK DU PUIS WHILE WORKING FOR MIGUEL IN THE 50'S)

While working for Don Miguel, he designed cocktail dresses that sold for \$79.00 wholesale---a lot of money in those days. Then, after 2 ½ years, Neal Diamond, Don Miguel's partner, decided to go out on his own which resulted in the formation of a new company called Neal of California. As a result, Neal offered Dick a lucrative increase in salary as the designer of

women's clothing for his new company. Desiring to treat Don Miguel fairly, Dick informed him of Neal's generous offer, giving him time to match the opportunity.

However, after Don refused to bargain, Dick, along with his pattern maker Rae, joined Neal of California where he was responsible for the entire line. Since Neal featured the use of beautiful silk fabrics, this provided a challenge Dick welcomed. In this new position, with Neal's company, Dick would sometimes assist with the marketing, as well. One campaign built around the theme, "WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN A LITTLE DIFFERENT.....AFTER DARK DESIGNS BY RICHARD DU PUIS," was an enormous hit within the market place. The slogan was accompanied by a picture of a white dove on a man's head. The photograph below is not of a model, but of Dick Du Puis wearing the white dove on his head.



When Dick retold the story, he flinched and wrinkled his nose recalling how it felt to have the bird's claws piercing his skin as it perched on his head. He described himself as not being a very happy camper, an expression which the camera clearly captured.

However, in spite of all the pain from the photo shoot, the picture with the attention getting slogan was placed in the orders going to every customer. As a result, it created such tremendous excitement it was framed by many customers and placed in a prominent location on their walls, thus, solidly positioning the Neal of California brand in their minds.

While working for Neal of California in a room that contained a concrete floor, Dick requested it be carpeted as a solution to his reoccurring sore feet and legs. Neal objected with numerous excuses as to why it would not be possible. Then, when some important clients arrived requesting to view some garment samples, Dick proceeded to carrying them immediately into the room and hang them on the wall racks. However, instead of focusing their attention on the beautiful garments, Neal noticed they were intently staring at Dick's shoes. Looking up at Dick, they asked, "What do you have on the bottom of your shoes?" Replying without drama or hesitation, Dick explained, "I have pieces of carpet glued to the bottom of my shoes to prevent pain in my feet and legs due to the hard concrete flooring. Since my boss will not authorize carpeting, this is my solution." Needless to say, the carpet arrived in record time!

Another sample of the outstanding ability Dick possessed at marketing occurred when he requested a quiet room for himself where he could create without chaos. Thus, he was given a 16 foot square room that he immediately decorated with turquoise paint on the walls, off white carpeting and filled with black lacquer furniture. There was also a sofa, chairs and a beautiful dining room table adorned with sparkling crystal and china. All this was done so the customers would feel special as they sat at a catered lunch and viewed the beautiful Du Puis designs. Then, after receiving such royal treatment, they would be escorted into Neal's office where they eagerly placed numerous orders. Another experience that stood out in Dick's mind was when Jack Bryan chartered a plane to Las Vegas for his customers and proceeded to conduct a fashion show while in route. The models showed Du Puis designs as they pranced down the narrow isle motivating a landslide of purchase orders from the onlookers.

After working for Neal of California for approximately 6 years, Dick went to work for Miss Eliette who was married to Jack Bryan. Miss Eliette was a husband and wife team designing mostly daytime and after five evening wear. Then after Jack Bryan left Eliette and started the house of Jack Bryan, Dick followed him with his design crew of four people. (A pattern maker, sample cutter, sample maker and a production man) In another career move, Dick also did production patterns for the House of Warren Z, owned by Jack and Elaine Lerman who became lifelong friends. In fact, Dick often custom designed many of Elaine's gowns she wore when attending exclusive Hollywood events; such as the Academy Awards.

DESIGNER EXPERIENCES

Dick's design career stretched over more than 30 years of sharing his unique fashion creations; always providing excellence to his customers. He sketched his design and then followed it all the way to completion. If he needed to demonstrate a technique, he possessed the ability to sit down and show how it could become a reality. He never sketched anything that he was unable to complete personally.

As a fashion designer, Dick attended shows in many exotic locations---Paris and London. Although it sounds glamorous, he was so intently focused on the designs that were coming down the runway he had no time to himself. As the models were maneuvering on the catwalk, Dick was busily zeroing in on aspects of a garment that he would incorporate in his lines; a sleeve, neckline or the shape of a skirt. He would then begin sketching some of these features into his next season's creations; figuring out which ones would be well received by the market place.

Even though each city offered incredible entertainment, he will bluntly tell you he had no time to indulge himself in excursions due to his tight schedule. Only once he told of hiring a cab driver, handing him a list of places he wanted to see, and allowing only enough time to do a drive by.

As a part of this trip, Dick would have packed 10-20 pieces of his designs that he specifically needed to center on as he chose fabric or beading materials. (Sleeves, collars, belts) Then at the close of the show, he would continue on to other locations where he chose the appropriate fabrics and decorative items for the designs.

BEADING

Early on, since Dick had earned extra money by working for a lady named Mrs. Milano who was known as an expert in beading, he learned firsthand the fundamentals of the process. Therefore, he was able to reduce the cost of incorporating beading into his designs because of cutting out the middle man. This resulted in allowing him to set up factories all over the world for the company. Therefore, after a show, Dick would fly first to Tokyo and pick out prints and colors, followed by a trip to Hong Kong where he supervised as many as 100 ladies sewing a part of the garment he had sketched. One of the factories he was responsible for starting in Korea specialized in combining beads with feathers; a unique process for that time. Since he did not speak the language, he was met at the airport by interpreters who never left his side. They would even sleep in a chair outside his room until he awakened each morning.

At other times, Dick would arrive with his sketches to a location where ten ladies sitting in a circle would each be working on separate designs. Then placing a stool in the center of the

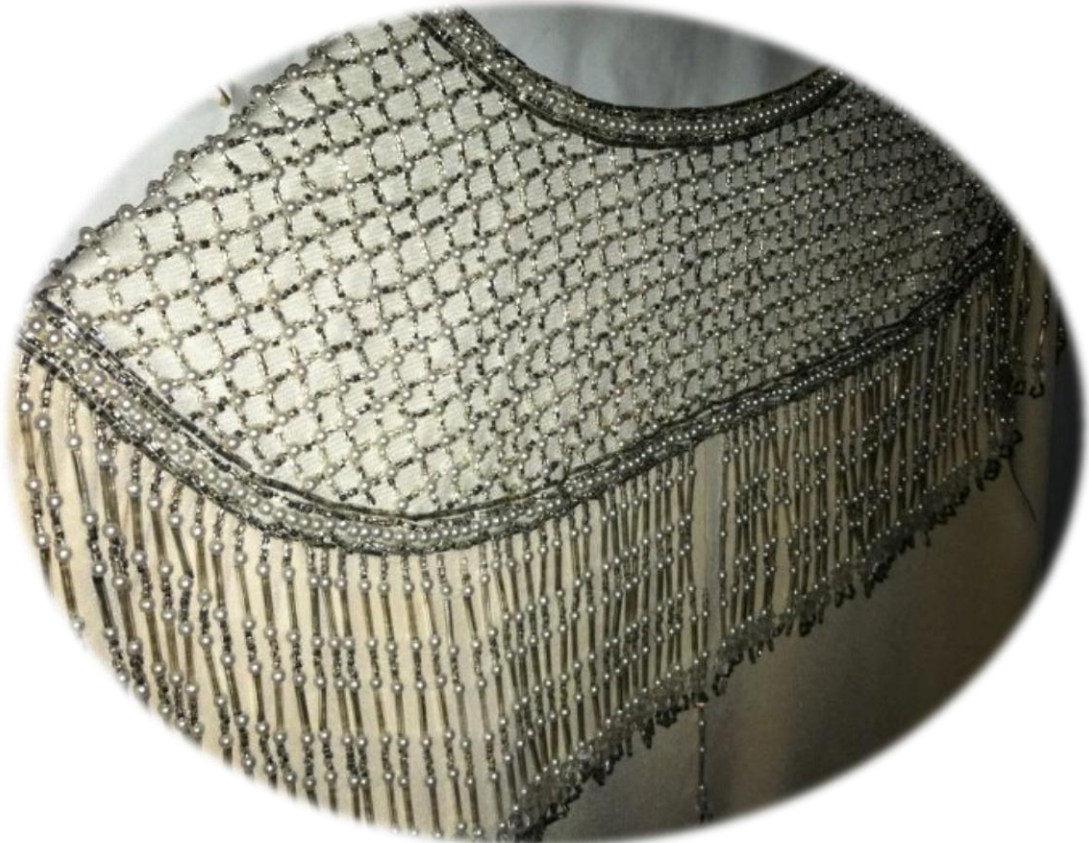
circle, he would roll from lady to lady monitoring all aspects of each design. It was at this point he would refine the design making all the necessary changes. Above all, a perfect pattern and sample had to be the result to assure the production of it to the masses.

Thus, this was the life of Dick Du Puis, the designer, who tirelessly traveled throughout the world with the goal of creating the most perfect garment for each woman. His worn and tattered passport had been hole punched 27 times to the Orient representing the demands necessary for a successful career in the world of fashion design.

BEADING DESIGNS FOR DU PUIS FASHIONS



Although the beading appears as an assortment of adornments placed on the collars in a random fashion, the pattern for these designs required an extremely intricate process and carefully constructed directions.





THE IMPACT OF BEADING ON A FINISHED GARMENT WAS TRULY DRAMATIC.

INTRICATE SLEEVE DESIGN



(NOTE THE COMPLICATED DESIGN IN THE SLEEVE INDICATING DICK'S ATTENTION TO DETAIL)

DESIGNER CONTEST

Throughout Dick Du Puis' career, competition was fierce at every turn. Thus, from the moment he entered the arena where industry giants designed at their well recognized sketching easels, he knew it was a must that each line from his pencil offer drama vision and impact; creating designs that were nothing short of spectacular showstoppers. It was absolutely critical to break barriers stretching his imagination to the outer limits by not patterning himself after the ideas of others, but leading the way with trendsetters, instead. Certainly due to his performance in the industry, at the end of a journey well traveled, no one would ever label Dick Du Puis as a follower. He was truly a risk taker and visionary beyond measure.

Therefore, it was apparent to all that Dick fully understood the necessity of this fact when, as a young designer employed by Neal of California, he entered the contest of his life. In 1963, after First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy took up residence in the White House, it was decided by industry movers and shakers that designers worldwide would be invited to create a fantasy gown suitable for her inaugural ball. All entrees would then be displayed by models on a catwalk just like a runway show in Paris or London.

Consequently, after tirelessly working on his creation to the point of absolute perfection, Dick hired two guards in uniform to deliver his finished entry to the designated site in a van lined inside with classy white paper for effect. Upon arrival to the hotel, one guard then held the top of an exquisitely designed garment bag while the other importantly carried the train. Onlookers were totally mesmerized by the dramatic arrival, being left in a state of anticipation of the garment concealed inside.

Then, when the magical moment arrived and numerous lights were aglow, all heads turned in anticipation toward the runway to the beat of many pounding hearts. Among the onlookers sitting at the Neal of California table located at the back of the room, sat a young courageous designer whose name was Dick Du Puis.

Then, as the first model pranced down the catwalk, thunderous applause resounded all over the hall in a demonstration of approval. At that moment, the skills and expertise of all the designers in the room were on display to the world.

Sitting spellbound and scarcely able to breath, Dick began committing every intricate detail of the fashions to memory as he carefully stored priceless information into the treasure chest of his mind.

Although time seemed to be quickly fleeting, in Dick's mind it appeared to stall as he nervously waited for his model to make her grand entrance down the runway. Thus, as

model after model dramatically moved along the catwalk to deafening applause, it only served to heighten his anxious state.

Unfortunately, the model Dick so carefully chose to wear his fabulous creation was simply not in the mix. Had something gone askew after all his careful planning? Since he had left no stone unturned, he could not imagine what would be causing the delay. His tongue felt numb as it stuck to the roof of his mouth that was as dry as cotton!

Then, alas! The beautifully shaped ivory face of his carefully chosen model wearing her shiny ebony hair in an elegant bubble hair style, appeared within Dick's view like a heavenly vision. One can only try and imagine the speed at which his heart began to beat. Quickly assessing the situation, he now realized in his anxious mind why everything felt frozen in time. It was very apparent the model wearing the Du Puis design was the last one scheduled to walk the runway. Why? What was the implication of being last? As a young designer, he was already sitting at the back of the room with only the wall behind him. Did he count so little?

However, these thoughts quickly vanished, when following Dick's directions to the letter; his model began royally floating along the runway as if carried effortlessly by a soft misty vapor enticing the audience to join her in perfect harmony. Wearing an exquisite white satin coat, draped gracefully around her tall slim body, the reflections were never purer or more distinct. Furthermore, the gapping onlookers were truly astonished as the rich fabric suddenly took on a silvery blue-gray appearance resembling the color of an oyster shell.

Understanding color and fabric so completely, Dick knew if he lined the beautiful white satin with a rich black taffeta, the material would appear as if it had been dipped into an icy liquid, thus creating an elixir to the human eye. Additionally, when selecting the fabric, he was also cognizant that a garment made of taffeta rustles and speaks to onlookers, creating a background effect like gentle wind whispering through the forest.

Even greater drama unfolded as the model turned so the audience could observe the sophisticated high rolled collar that turned into a regal train. Then, returning to her runway starting point and dramatically opening the coat, she displayed the black diamond colored lining allowing the material to sparkle like fairy dust. Not missing a beat, she followed this maneuver by raising her arms above her head and inviting the elegant coat to slither softly to the floor at her feet.

Then, sassily stepping forward, the audience saw what appeared to be a simple white silk gown identical to the colors in the coat, until a slender ivory leg suddenly peeped out a side slit. Gasping, the audience immediately realized they were witnessing the first show of leg in clothing designs using a slit in a garment. Since opera hose (panty hose) had just been introduced to the marketplace, Dick was once again on top of his game by realizing freedom

from ugly hard to hide garters would allow women to now show more leg. However, it is impossible to describe the conflict between the company owner, Neal, and Dick that occurred over the decision to have a garment displayed on the runway containing a daring slit. Although Neal strongly balked, Dick stuck to his guns and won.

Thus, still buzzing about the daring slit, the audience was caught off guard by the elegance of the gown as the model strutted down the runway revealing the low cut back accompanied by cascading clusters of black organza roses that had the effect of a medicinal draught to the souls of everyone. Thus, what began as grand murmurs, soon reached a fevered pitch of “bravos” as the walls echoed with unrestrained applause.

Then, right on cue, the sound of a voice carried throughout the room announcing: “THE WINNER OF THE JACKELINE KENNEDY FANTASY INAGURAL GOWN CONTEST IS: “NEAL OF CALIFORNIA---DESIGNER: RICHARD DU PUIS!”

Can you only imagine, dear readers, what Richard O’Neill Du Puis, a southern boy from Gueydan, Louisiana, was feeling at this moment in his life? Like David, he had gone up against the Goliaths in the fashion design industry and won. At this moment, it is my hope that you are smiling and clapping right along with the proud writer!

As a result of winning the contest, the elegant coat and gown Dick had designed and completed to perfection were transported to the fashion centers in all the major cities throughout the country for all in the industry to admire. In addition, Dick was informed that a photograph of it was placed in a time capsule in Los Angeles as an example of 1960 clothing designs of that era.

In conclusion, James 4:6 says it best with the words, “But He gives more grace. Therefore it says, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Amen!

JACKIE KENNEDY COAT



FRONT OF GOWN



SASSY SLIT



BACK OF JACKIE GOWN

