

Oleg Cassini at Stephens:

# *Classic and contemporary*

An exhibit at the college pulls from 3,000 items from the internationally acclaimed designer

By JOANNA SCHNEIDER



Illustrations by Krysten Chambrot

Marilyn Monroe, Grace Kelly and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis all counted on him for cutting-edge fashion. Now, less than a year after Oleg Cassini's death, Stephen's College has opened the doors of its new Historic Costume Gallery in Lela Raney Wood Hall to showcase the designer's innovative work.

To set up the show, Stephens raided its own Costume Library, which began in 1958. It houses approximately 12,000 garments from design houses including Chanel, Oscar de la Renta and Valentino, in addition to Cassini. The collection dates to 1790 and allows students to study the variance in past and present garment construction and the evolution of fashion trends, says Cate Land, student public relations coordinator.

The Cassini exhibit marks the first design show in the new gallery. The entire exhibit, including the grand opening event Oct. 6, was planned and executed by students.

"For this project, we had so many tasks, but also so much freedom," Land says. "The biggest challenge was organizing so many people with such an ambitious task in only three weeks."

The exhibit, which will remain open until mid-December, features re-creations and original sample garments, as well as Cassini's original sketches. In addition to classic Jackie Kennedy Onassis pieces, the exhibit also includes tennis, evening, wedding and ethnic-inspired wear, all of which represent Cassini's design style, Land says.

"Cassini looked at the female figure and was able to see not just what was trendy but what looked good on a woman," she says. "From there, he was able to



SARA DEBOLD/Missourian

**Sara Emami views the Oleg Cassini fashion collection at Stephens College and makes sketches of a few of them for her class.**

start a trend. For a man to be able to accentuate a woman's qualities so well is astounding."

Cassini's works were first displayed at the Round Bobbin Sewing Expo in St. Charles earlier this fall. Because of the positive reception to the exhibit, Jackie Palmer, a student intern, suggested the garments remain on exhibit at home in Stephens' new gallery. Since removing garments from storage is an involved process, says Monica McMurry, curator and dean of the School of Design and Fashion, it seemed only logical to display Cassini's pieces at Stephen's before returning them to storage.

Students hope the exhibit not only lends a greater appreciation for Cassini as a designer and a man, but also highlights Stephens' facilities.

"This gives people a better ap-

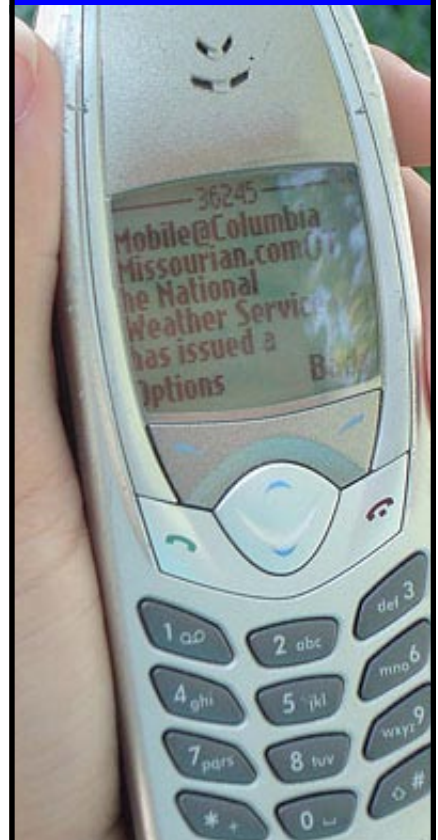
preciation for the workmanship and attention to detail involved in fashion design," says Whitney Bailey, fashion communications major at Stephens. "How the garments can last for 25 years and still be in prime condition. Being able to actually touch the garments is truly amazing."

Cassini, who designed clothing for more than 70 years, was the first American designer to be recognized on an international level by both consumers and peers. Cassini has been credited with taking both the A-line dress and sheath dress to new design realms and was one of the first to franchise his name.

The exhibit shows the evolution of style, construction and unique period pieces, says Stephanie La Hue, Stephens graduate and adjunct instructor.

"There is a lot of variety, but still classic styles," La Hue says.

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SARA DEBOLD/Missourian

**Andrea Goodwin, an equine buisness management major at Stephens College, peers through a glass case exhibiting Oleg Cassini's work.**

“This exhibit shows that some things never go out of style.”

La Hue says she feels the exhibit is a learning opportunity for the community and working on a project like this affords her fashion merchandising students a chance to gain valuable experience.

“This is a good way to expose students to the treasures we have,” she says. “It educates them on the care of garments and the importance of preserving the integrity of each piece. It provides them with a more well-rounded repertoire of experience and allows us to be more present in the community.”

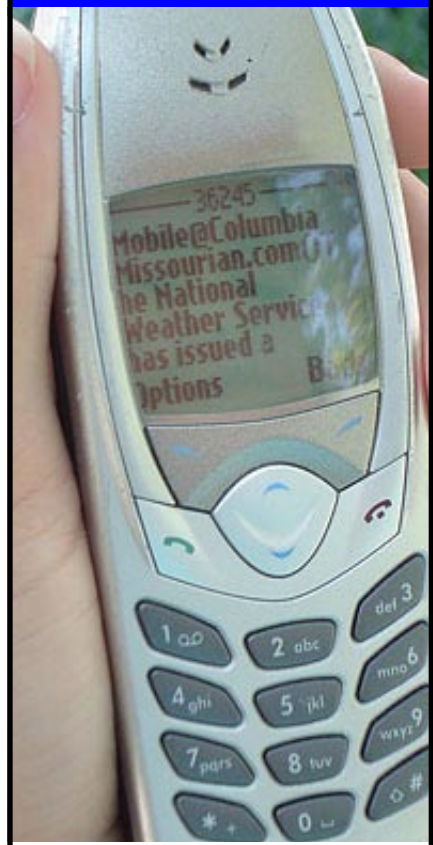
The Costume Library, overseen by McMurry, is supported by alumni and designer donations.

Most recently, the library collection is in the process of moving to a climate-controlled storage facility, and UV-shielding windows have been installed in the gallery to further preserve the garments while in storage and on display.

The relationship between Cassini and Stephens was begun by Cassini's wife, Marianne Nester, in the 1980s. Since then, the Cassini collection has grown to more than 3,000 pieces and remains an integral part of the school's historic costume collection.

The show is free to the public from noon to 3 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. More information available by going to [www.stephens.edu](http://www.stephens.edu), and clicking on events calendar. ■

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