

O'AHU  
Tribute to a Master

Alfred Shaheen was a consummate craftsman, a crackerjack businessman, a fighter pilot who flew eighty-five missions during World War II—and, most famously of all, the father of modern Hawai'i fashion. His aloha shirts clad the smart set throughout the 1950s and '60s, and his bombshell dresses from the same era still make women swoon for their impeccable tailoring and sheer sexiness. These days, antique Shaheen dresses that went for \$14.95 new sell on eBay and Etsy for hundreds of dollars, a tribute to the master's innovation and style.



Honolulu and selling his clothing across the United States.

"Visionary, genius, risk-taker and above all builder," says his devoted daughter Camille of her father. In the late 1990s Camille and her husband, William Tunberg, set out to collect her father's work. They have now gathered a vast assemblage, including clothing, fabrics, photographs, ads, even buttons and shoes. And this November, drawing from Camille's collection, the Bishop Museum opened the largest exhibit of Shaheen's work ever staged, *HI Fashion: The Legacy of Alfred Shaheen*. The exhibit, which runs through February 4, is a designer's dream, featuring some 225



But Shaheen was more than just a clothing designer—he was an industry builder. His Lebanese family had an expertise in the garment industry that went back generations, and Shaheen fused that knowledge with his own training in aeronautical engineering and never looked back. Rather than import fabrics, he built a factory in Honolulu to make his own. Rather than use designs from Europe and North America, he trained Island printmakers to fashion cloth adorned with the iconography of the Pacific and Asia. Rather than buying dyes, he learned to produce them and pioneered the art of printing with metallics. His mother, an expert tailor, trained local seamstresses in the art of dress construction, teaching them, for example, how to cleat a bodice. By 1959 Shaheen was employing four hundred artisans in

Shaheen creations—including an entire wall filled with over a hundred different aloha shirts. There are dresses with tiki art, monstera art, fish art, kapa-inspired dresses, Tahitian-inspired dresses. "Shaheen made bold, beautiful patterns using multicultural images," says the museum's Noelle Kahanu, who has herself taken to surfing the web in search of Shaheen creations. "He made aloha wear global—and fashionable."

—Julia Steele

bishopmuseum.org

Courtesy Camille Shaheen