



Current Exhibit

Hawaii's Alfred Shaheen: Fabric to Fashion

Hawaii's Alfred Shaheen: Fabric to Fashion, a new exhibition opening at the San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles May 18, 2010, is a celebration of the legacy of textile designer and master fabric printer Alfred Shaheen, the origins of the Hawaiian print and the fusion fashion aesthetic it spawned. This is the first major retrospective exhibition of Hawaiian textiles and aloha wear manufactured by Alfred Shaheen on the island of Oahu over a 40-year period. The opening reception, free with admission, is Sunday, May 23, 2:00-4:00pm.

Hawaii's Alfred Shaheen: Fabric to Fashion is curated by Museum curator Deborah Corsini and Hawaiian textile scholar Dr. Linda Arthur, and will feature 100+ objects drawn from the collection of Camille Shaheen-Tunberg, Alfred Shaheen's daughter. Stunning yardage representing the textile designs Shaheen produced and key examples of the men's, women's and children's garments that visually conjure Hawaii's complex cultural history will fill all three Museum galleries. In addition to textiles, the exhibit will showcase archival photos and ads that illuminate how the textiles and garments were designed, manufactured and marketed.

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Monstera. Dress by Alfred Shaheen.

These exhibitions and related programs are funded in part by WESTAF, Silicon Valley Community Foundation; the David and Lucile Packard Foundation; Arts Council Silicon Valley in partnership with the County of Santa Clara and the National Endowment for the Arts; the City of San Jose; and the Santa Clara Valley Quilt Association. Media sponsor: The Mercury News

Fabric to Fashion

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Alfred Shaheen wed technological innovation to socially responsible business practices. He revitalized Pacific Island/Asian textile traditions to forge a fusion fashion design aesthetic now recognized worldwide as a visual marker—not only of a transnational Hawaiian culture—but of a West Coast “American” lifestyle that is informal, environmentally aware and multi-cultural.

A Lebanese immigrant/engineer, Shaheen pioneered a silk-screening method, professionally trained his employees who were Hawaiian, Japanese, Chinese and other ethnicities as Shaheen’s City of Craftsmen, and mined the visual iconography of Hawaii’s multi-ethnic community to create a new design aesthetic.

“This show will transport you to a tropical paradise,” said Corsini. “Shaheen’s designs are an exuberant profusion of color, pattern and sophisticated compositions. They capture the lushness of a tropical climate and the spirit of exotic cultures of the Pacific islands.”

Added co-curator Dr. Linda Arthur, “Hawaiian textile art, especially designs from the 1940s and 50s, have a quality unsurpassed in other decades. Shaheen championed the idea of using Hawaiian textile art as a means of expressing ethnicity and, as an innovative businessman, employed artists as salaried employees and was the first to use modern fashion promotion and marketing on the Islands.”



Tahitian Girl dress by Alfred Shaheen.
Photo by Camille Shaheen.

Sunday May 23, 2010; 1-2pm
East Meets West: Cultural Influence in Shaheen’s Textile Designs, with Linda Arthur, Ph.D.

Through textile art designed for clothing used in both Hawaii and the mainland US, Alfred Shaheen brought the art of Asia to the West by innovating Western-styled garments with ethnic textile designs. Tickets available at www.sjqUILTmuseum.org/calendar or call 408.971.0323 x14. \$15 general public, \$10 members and students.

Sunday May 23, 2010; 2-4pm

Aloha attire is encouraged for the opening reception for three exhibitions celebrating Hawaiian textile traditions. Gallery walkthrough with *Hawaii’s Alfred Shaheen: Fabric to Fashion* co-curator, Dr. Linda Arthur, at 2:30. No reservation required. Reception and gallery walkthrough are free with Museum admission.

In association with this exhibit, Eddie’s Quilting Bee is offering introductory Hawaiian shirt-making classes with sessions in June and July.

Secrets of the Aloha Shirt

Make your own Hawaiian shirt while learning efficient sewing techniques



that you can apply to other garments. Class includes serger techniques and other custom touches. Students must have taken Eddie’s Machine Basics and Beginning Sewing before taking this class or have equivalent experience with basic sewing and garment-making skill and be able to read a pattern.

Choose which of these sessions works best for you:

Jun 3, 17, 24 (Thu) 10:00-1:00

Jun 8, 22, 29 (Tue) 6:30-9:30

Jul 1, 8, 15 (Thu) 6:30-9:30

Class Fee: \$60.00; register by calling 408.830.9505 or stopping by Eddie’s Quilting Bee at 480 S. Mathilda Ave, Sunnyvale, CA 94086. More details at <http://www.quiltingbee.com/classes.html>

This exhibition is co-presented by: Hui’Ilima of Santa Clara County, Sak n’ Sak, Kawailehua Hula Ohana, Japantown Business Association, Halau Napuaokamo kihana’ohaikapolioluana, Yu-Ai Kai Community Senior Service & Sake San Jose, Nikkei Matsuri, Pacific Islanders’ Cultural Association.

A Conversation with Camille Shaheen-Tunberg

Alfred Shaheen's daughter Camille owns and manages the rights to his designs and his official website, www.alfredshaheen.com.

Did you understand growing up the cultural impact of your father's work?

No. I grew up in the midst of many different cultures and took the fusion of these cultures for granted. Because my family is first and second generation Lebanese, our home was filled with Arabic cooking and music. I went to school and worked with people who were Hawaiian, Japanese, Chinese, and Portuguese. Ethnic imagery and the fusion of cultures on textiles and garments seemed very natural to me.

When did you realize the importance of maintaining a collection of his work?

In the late 1990s, my husband, Bill Tunberg, bought me a book on collectible Hawaiian shirts. As I went through the book, I was surprised by the vast number of Shaheen's. When I came across Shaheen prints with labels other than Shaheen, I called my father to ask about them. Although I had grown up in the business and remembered many of the prints, it was only then that I learned of the other labels he produced. My father rarely talked to his children about the business. The more I learned, the more I realized how important it was to document Shaheen history, which included collecting my father's work.

In thinking of the impact of his work, can you comment on the effects of the social and economic changes that took place in Hawaii and the fashion industry as a result?

Historians say that my father globalized the use of ethnic imagery on textiles and in fashion,

Joss Sticks.
Dress by
Alfred
Shaheen.



and much has been written about the social and economic changes in Hawaii as a result. These effects stemmed from very simple goals: to provide for his family and employees, and to produce culturally authentic, meaningful garments that were exotic and dramatic.

Do you think of him as an artist, a businessman, or something else altogether?

I think of my father as a builder and a teacher. He loved the part of the business that involved building, whether it was planning a new plant, opening new stores, or trying to find a theme for one of the five lines he did each year. My father disliked the day-to-day "housekeeping" of the business and focused on the creative aspects: the art, designing equipment, figuring out how to produce the textiles and garments, and he loved marketing. He was happiest when inventing something new, for example, his metallic dyes—he came to life when talking about them, even in his later years. Whatever my father learned, he passed on to others. This can be seen in his work: he wanted every piece of cloth he printed to have importance, a historical background with a story that would preserve and communicate the history of cultural regions to others for generations.

He's been called a visionary and a genius. Are there ways he imparted that to you and others?

I can only tell you how he imparted this to me: it was through his philosophies. My father was deeply spiritual, believing that God is the intelligence governing energy. He believed that there is no such thing as physical matter, only intelligent energy which makes everything we perceive appear as matter. He used visualization and prayer to help him build, whether it was his first print plant or his relationships. He believed that life is filled with dichotomies; for example, the ability to feel love is a wonderful gift, even though its counterpart is deep sorrow. He believed that our intuition is our Guardian Angel and tried his best to listen at all times. He believed in the power of the mind, that words and thoughts ultimately manifest themselves. He suffered these manifestations through bouts of profound, debilitating depression, which he ultimately overcame. My father was deeply grateful for his life, which helped him accept his disappointments. He worked hard at being true to his beliefs and tried to help others discover and understand theirs.

Can you share any particular anecdotes that our members would appreciate?

For the longest time, my father wasn't aware of the impact his clothing had on women. His mother, Mary, told him often how women would fall in love with the garments. He was never confident about his women's clothing and he didn't believe her. One day she made him sit behind the scenes in the Waikiki store to watch the reactions of women as they tried on his clothing. He was amazed at the joy and beauty Shaheen clothing brought to women of all shapes and sizes.