

"Fashion is always about eccentricity. Given our present cultural uniformity, that's very important," says Ralph Rucci. The American designer's fashions are eccentric in the best sense--at once exuberant and austere, yet never loud or capricious. Rucci's garments are an ode to craft and to the grace of the female body. They are all about the miracles that can be achieved by the human "hand". Rucci's style follows laws of its own and creates its topicality over and beyond the daily round of the fashion business -- "My clothes evolve one season at a time," he says. "Every collection builds on the past."

Rucci draws his inspiration from a private aesthetic universe, a mixture of diverse elements--Far Eastern asceticism, modern art and ethno-folklore. His personal pantheon includes Cy Twombly, Francis Bacon, Joseph Beuys, Flemish Renaissance, Cristobal Balenciaga, Mme. Gres, Coco Chanel, Charles James, Gianfranco Ferre, Halston, Hubert de Givenchy, James Galanos, Pauline de Rothschild, Elsa Peretti, Diana Vreeland, Mrs. Deeda Blair, Patti Smith, and Silvana Mangano.

Rucci's trademarks are scintillating paintings made into prints, meandering Frankenstein and "worm" stitches, suspension techniques, the vibration technique, the thread of life technique, and many more with an unerring eye for volume and structure. But, above all, he has an almost obsessive interest in the materials.

*"I love unusual materials that mix and reference both luxury and technology. Materials such as stiff horsehair, paper taffeta, silk faille, silk moire, double-faced wools and cashmeres, materials that speak and whisper--chiffon, georgette, cotton pique, hammered satins, and heavy satin Duchess. They are all equally important as rubber, bonded leathers, latex, and all sorts of embroideries on tulle to create fabrics, from leather to religious couching thread."*

The clothes that emerge from all this are as magnificent as they are wearable. Despite their architectural precision, they look gossamer light. They are made for women of taste, enormous style, and a penchant for understatement.

Ralph Rucci was born in Philadelphia in 1957. An artistic child, he later studied Philosophy and Literature at Temple University. Later, in New York, he attended The Fashion Institute of Technology. After graduating he apprenticed with Halston before going off on his own in 1981. In September of that year, he showed his first collection---made to order in essence. He borrowed \$10,000 from an aunt, and labored alone for months draping and cutting all of the first toiles and the samples. He showed formally at the old Westbury Hotel on Madison Avenue, and as the story goes, he wheeled the racks to the hotel himself, assisted by several sample-makers.

A select clientele slowly developed, for whom he worked tirelessly thereafter. In 1987, he

had built the business to some significance only to succumb to the worst crash in American economic markets since the Great Depression in 1929. He barely remained afloat, and in 1994 he renamed the company Chado Ralph Rucci, an allusion to the chado Japanese tea ceremony and its values, such as harmony, purity, and respect, elements he's always strived for in his work. His international breakthrough finally came in 2002 when the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture Francaise invited him, as the only American in history, to show a Couture collection in Paris as part of the official calendar. Never had an American been invited under his own name to show together on the calendar great houses. He showed Haute Couture in Paris for five seasons. He returned in 2007 to show a Ready-to-Wear collection for the international market.

Rucci has been the subject of many retrospectives, notably The Costume Institute of the Kent State University Museum (2005-2006), The Fashion Institute of Technology (2007), The Costume Institute of the Philadelphia Museum of Art (2007), and The Phoenix Art Museum (2008).

Prestigious awards have included The Star Award from the Fashion Group International of New York (2005), The Cooper Hewitt National Design Award (2008), The Couture Council of the Museum at FIT (2006), The Pratt Institute Icon Award (2009), The Philadelphia International Festival of the Arts Visionary Award for Fashion (2011), The SCAD Andre' Leon Talley Lifetime Achievement Award (2012), and an Honorary Doctoral Degree from The Drexel University College of Art and Design (2015).

Rucci's clothes are in the permanent collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Victoria and Albert Museum in London, The DeYoung Museum in San Francisco, The Phoenix Art Museum, The Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, The Texas Fashion Collection in Denton, Texas, among others.

Films have included David Boatman's, Ralph Rucci: A Designer and His House (2008), narrated by Martha Stewart and produced by the Sundance Channel and Christian Leigh's "Ralph Rucci" (2010).

Books published on Rucci include The Art of Weightlessness by Valerie Steele, Patricia Mears and Clare Sauro (2007), and Autobiography of a Fashion Designer (2011) by Bauer and Dean Publishers with photographs by Baldomero Fernandez.

In 2011, Rucci received the great honor of being inducted into the Fashion Group International Walk of Fame. His plaque sits on the south east corner of 39th and Seventh Avenue, right before Halston and James Galanos, set within the sidewalk for all time.

# RR331

**RALPH RUCCI**

*"I always approach a new collection with the idea of beginning with something unfinished or incomplete from the previous collection. I take these threads of thought and begin, on an entirely conceptual level, to braid and enmesh them all into something new, always seeking an evolution of thought and design. For me, each new collection has its own point of view, but they are all ultimately related to the same body of work that I started in the beginning, in 1980. Each collection is an outward visual of the state of the mind--an extension of my mind personally and how the work must now be suggested to the ever-changing clients within a culture in constant confusion and without any clarity of what denotes taste in the modern world.*