

Champagne Reception Friday for Darien Historical Society Exhibit on Fashion from 1940s Through '90s

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In keeping with its mission to tell the ongoing story of “costume”, one of history’s most tangible artifacts, the Darien Historical Society is presenting designer and ready-to-wear styles that existed during and after World War II.

Mannequins on the Runway, Haute Couture and Contemporary Designs of the 20th Century highlights five decades of fashion with designer outfits from the 1940s through the 1990s.

It follows the history of prêt-à-porter, or ready-to-wear, as it largely replaced haute couture in the fashion industry. The exhibit opens on April 21 and runs through August 2017, with a **Champagne Reception on April 21 from 6:30-8:30 p.m.** and Ladies’ Luncheons with the Curator on May 3 and 10 at 11:30 a.m.

Curator of the show, Babs White, set up the exhibit to mimic a 20th century fashion show, with mannequins lined up as if on the runway. White, who has her own 47-year history with the Darien Historical Society as <https://darienite.com>, arranged the fashions chronologically, beginning with a 1947 design by Christian Dior.

She commented, “At the end of World War II, women longed to replace fashion’s stiff, square shoulders and straight lines. Dior’s more romantic look took the fashion world by storm.” Dior’s success allowed Paris to reassert its world leadership of haute couture following its decline during the war.

Dior eventually commissioned his designs to be produced abroad as ready-to-wear lines in the 1950s and Yves Saint Laurent followed suit with his “Rive Gauche” designs.

In the 60s, the charm and elegant style of Jackie Kennedy was greatly admired and copied, and Sophie of Saks and Elizabeth Arden, both represented in the exhibit, produced designs in New York.

By the mid-60s, fashion began to focus on youth, their music, and their “free-wheeling” attitude, producing the most potent symbol of the 60s scene, the miniskirt, also on display.

Bill Blass and Oscar de la Renta creations reflect the bold fabrics of the 1980s, which also heralded the look of big shoulders and giant sleeves. The Reagan administration signaled the return of formality, and Adolfo and Ungaro fashions mirror the 90s, an era in which ready-to-wear had become dominant.

In keeping with a typical fashion show of the 20th century, the exhibit concludes with a bridal gown: a 1983 design by Carolina Herrera, socialite and longtime fixture on the best-dressed list.

Fairfield County Bank, Darien Board of Realtors, Pagano’s Seafood, Palmer’s of Darien, Leary’s Liquor Cabinet, Cesco’s Trattoria, Sanda’s Cleaners and Tailors, Darien Sport Shop, The Finishing Touch Landscaping, and Diane Browne Catering sponsor *Mannequins on the Runway*.

The hours of the exhibit are from noon to 5 p.m. from Tuesdays through Thursdays, and on Sundays from noon to 3 p.m. A non-member donation of \$5 is suggested. Cost for the Champagne Reception on April 21 is \$50 for members and \$65 for nonmembers.

Ladies’ Luncheons on May 3 and 10 are \$25 for members and \$35 for nonmembers. To make reservations or to find out about sponsorship opportunities, contact the Historical Society at (203) 655-9233.

The Darien Historical Society is located at 45 Old Kings Highway North. To find out more about *Mannequins on the Runway, Haute Couture and Contemporary Designs of the 20th Century*, please visit, darienhistorical.org.