



COURTESY OSCAR DE LA RENTA/ARCHIVE

Countdown to Oscar

Veteran editor André Leon Talley reflects on a career in fashion and his Oscar de la Renta retrospective at the de Young. **By MARYANN LoRUSSO**

It's no surprise that **André Leon Talley** has been called one of the last great fashion editors. During his 40-year career he worked for **Andy Warhol**, apprenticed with famed fashion editor **Diana Vreeland** and partied with Karl Lagerfeld. He spent three decades at *American Vogue*, earning a front-row seat at countless runway shows and nurturing friendships with fashion luminaries like Editor-in-Chief **Anna Wintour**.

Now 66, and still standing tall at 6 feet 6 inches, Talley hasn't slowed down much. After leaving his *Vogue* contributing editor post in 2013, he helped launch a new fashion magazine in Russia before turning his attention to other projects. Last year he curated an **Oscar de la Renta** exhibition in a gallery named for Talley at the SCAD Museum in Savannah, and he's currently hosting a *Vogue* podcast in which he talks style with celebrities and fashion insiders. His latest endeavor has him heading west this month as curator of the highly anticipated exhibition *Oscar de la Renta: The Retrospective* at the de Young Museum. Running March 12 through May 30, the show traces the rise of the legendary designer's early career in Spain, his formative years at several iconic fashion houses, and his role dressing some of the world's most illustrious women.

Talley, who enjoyed a longtime friendship with the late designer, chatted with the *Nob Hill Gazette* about the upcoming exhibition, the world of high fashion, and how San Francisco style turns him on.

NHG: What compelled you to curate the Oscar de la Renta retrospective?

ALT: The De la Renta family asked me to curate and it was an incredible honor. Oscar was very important to me and I considered him family. He was very much a part of my life since 1975, when I first came on the scene in New York City. When I was a young man working at *WWD*, he and his first wife were one of the first New York couples to invite me to

their home on Fifth Avenue. For the next 30 to 40 years, he had me over for dinner with people like the Kissingers, and I often dined with Oscar's family alone. It was an exciting, wonderful world of beauty and style and great conversation.

What was Oscar like professionally?

When I was working on *Vogue*, we often previewed designers' collections, in both New York and Paris. Over the years, I often got to sit with Oscar and watch him in the process of creating a collection. For him, it was a collaboration of language, vocabulary, research and inspiration. He loved to talk, network and bond socially. He was open and confident. He was a very generous, kind man. He stood out because of his manners, which were faultless, and his wit and generosity and loyalty.

Why were his clothes so inspiring?

Oscar's designs were appropriate, but they also rendered the women who wore them beautiful. He knew what women needed, what was in the template of the season. He dressed them for their lives. He believed in luxurious fabrics, ornamentations and details. He always conveyed a very fine aesthetic. He dressed important women, he dressed society. And he had a special relationship with his clients. They were his friends. He dressed them and he ate dinner with them.

Oscar died in October 2014. When was the last time you two talked?

The last time I spent time with him was at Anna's son **Charlie Shaffer's** wedding on Long Island in June 2014. Oscar did the wedding dress [for bride **Elizabeth Cordry**], and he arrived in a helicopter.

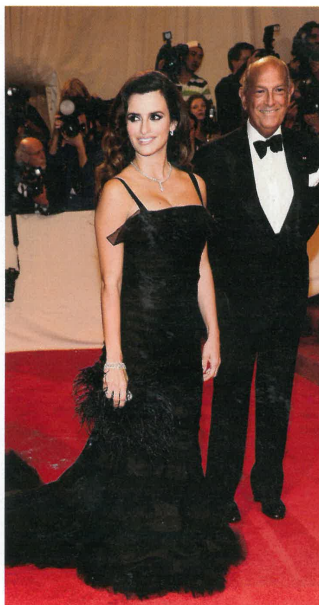
TOP: Oscar de la Renta and models at the finale of his spring 1996 show. **THIS ROW (L-R):** Evening ensemble, spring 2011; gold lamé evening ensemble, pre-fall 2011; Penélope Cruz in a black silk evening dress, fall 2012; Hillary Clinton in a printed chiné silk taffeta dress and wrap, 2002.



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“Trends are not important. Emotions are important. What I care about is: How does fashion make you feel?”
— André Leon Talley

Oscar's death created a void in the fashion community, and his successor, Peter Copping, had big shoes to fill. What do you think of Copping's work at the house so far?

I think Peter is doing an incredible job. His second collection was absolutely wonderful. He understood it was important to [maintain the label's] aesthetic, but take it in his own direction. He understands quality and the way to interpret the world of Oscar de la Renta to make it modern and youthful.

Will the upcoming retrospective include fashion from his years at Balmain, too?

There will be more than 10 galleries and over 100 ensembles, from Oscar's early works of 1967, up to the last season of his life. There will be many Balmain's.

Which outfits are your favorites?

I love all the clothes, but one of my personal favorites is a long, metallic, embroidered dress that was worn by Mrs. De la Renta. Another favorite is a geranium skirt with flamenco-inspired ruffles that's paired with a navy and sapphire blouse. I also love a pair of black velvet trousers that was worn by **Nan Kempner**.

She was a true fashion maven. What is your definition of a stylish person?

Someone who is confident being himself or herself, who dares to follow his or her own rules, never follows trends, is appropriately dressed but also inventive. It's 2016, so I think you can have the freedom to wear what you want to at an event, whether it's a kilt or a business suit. If you feel confident, you walk out and wear it with pride. There are no rules anymore.

So you're not big on trends.

Trends are not important. Emotions are important. What I care about is: How does fashion make you feel? And that goes for everything—from your clothes to your house to your work environment.

You're known as one of the last editors with a sense of fashion history. What do you think of fashion bloggers, many of whom have not been formally schooled in fashion design and history?

There's room for everyone in the world to have an opinion. I love the young bloggers, and I think social media has turned the world into an open library. Information is power, and you can [retrieve it] on your watch, your smartphone ... I think it's marvelous.

Do you miss magazine publishing, or is it a relief to not be on perpetual deadline?

I do miss it. I'm nostalgic for that world, which I find very exciting. But I'm enjoying hosting the *Vogue* podcast. And we may want to take the [De la Renta] exhibit to other cities. I hope to curate more shows at more museums in America.

What do you think of San Francisco style?

I think San Francisco has great style, beginning with the Golden Gate Bridge. You've got beautiful restaurants, houses—such as [the one belonging] to my friend **Danielle Steel**. Some of the most stylish women in the world reside right here in San Francisco. **NRG**

Listen to Talley's podcast at vogue.com/13335624/vogue-podcast/

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TOP: Oscar de la Renta and André Leon Talley at a 2005 book signing.
THIS ROW (L-R): Taylor Swift in an embroidered silk organza evening dress, 2014; Amy Adams in silk tulle, 2013; marigold silk taffeta dress with black silk tulle overblouse, spring 2012; Sarah Jessica Parker in a duchesse satin and velvet gown, 2014; fuchsia silk faille with metallic embroidery, fall 2013.



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