

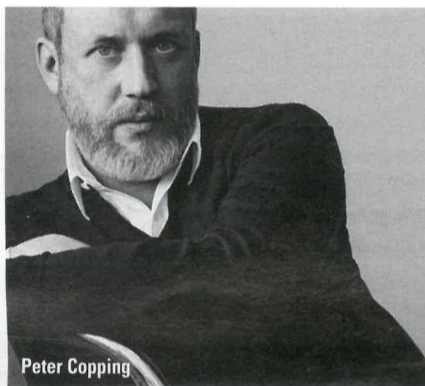
Copping Skills

Nearly a year after Oscar de la Renta's death, his successor, Peter Copping, shares his vision for the fashion house. **By MARYANN LoRUSSO**

Fashion mavens filed into the Oscar de la Renta runway show in New York last February buzzing with anticipation—and maybe a bit of apprehension. Just four months after the death of its beloved founder, the house was launching its first collection under the guidance of a new creative director, de la Renta's handpicked successor, **Peter Copping**. The two had hoped to collaborate before Copping took the helm at the company de la Renta founded in 1965, but, alas, the 82-year-old fashion legend succumbed to cancer just days after the appointment was announced.

At the show, de la Renta's widow, Annette, gathered with longtime devotees such as **Barbara Walters** and **Nancy Kissinger**, as well as new fans like **Taylor Swift** and **Karlie Kloss**. One could almost imagine the collective sigh of relief as they watched an elegantly embroidered black bouclé coat paired with a roll-neck ivory blouse glide down the runway, followed by a slew of ladylike coatdresses, floral skirt suits, ruffled evening gowns, and those playful little dresses de la Renta was known for. These were soon followed by some unexpected geometric weaves and graphic prints, edgy necklines and unconventional color pairings. In line with de la Renta's legacy, the collection was feminine, sophisticated and self-assured. It was also slightly hipper and more youthful.

As the one-year anniversary of de la Renta's death approaches next month, it's safe to say the house sits on solid-yet-compelling ground. But how has this past year played out for the man who now occupies one of the industry's most revered seats? According to Copping, who sat down with the *Nob Hill Gazette* last month, "It's been exciting, but there have been certain challenges as well. I tend to just get on with it and take it all in stride."



SEBASTIAN KIM

"Taking it in stride" requires a good amount of grace when your first day of work coincides with your predecessor's funeral. "It was only until I saw all these people, like **Henry Kissinger** and **Mrs. Clinton** and **Anna Wintour**, up there on the stage speaking passionately about him, that I realized how much Oscar meant to so many people," Copping says.

Without de la Renta's guidance, the Oxford-raised Copping, 48, had to rely on people who were close to the late designer, including longtime sales director **Boaz Mazor**. Of course, Copping's own impressive resume didn't hurt. After graduating from London's Central Saint Martins fashion school and the Royal College of Art, he spent two decades in Paris, first interning for **Christian Lacroix**, then working for **Sonia Rykiel**, **Louis Vuitton** and **Nina Ricci**, where he was named artistic director in 2009.

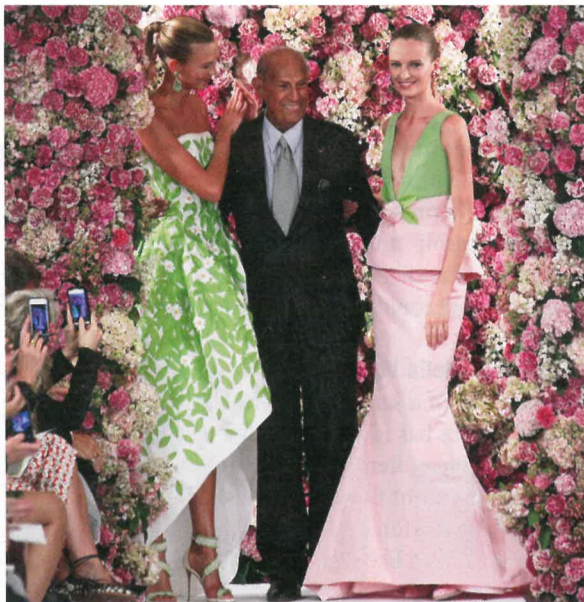
Still, Copping knew he had huge shoes to fill. The perpetually tanned and charismatic de la Renta was just as popular with the ladies-who-lunch crowd as he was with generations of style icons, from **Jacqueline Kennedy** to **Sarah Jessica Parker**. So Copping decided to go slowly and honor the legacy he'd inherited, continuing in the master's footsteps instead of wiping the slate clean. "That didn't seem the right thing to do straight off," says the soft-spoken but garrulous designer.

After earning accolades for his fall 2015 collection, he turned to bridal and resort, both shown last spring. The latter embraced what Copping calls "Oscar's world"—an homage to both the Dominican Republic, where the late designer was born, and New York, where de la Renta lived and worked for much of his life. Fans were pleased with the exuberant Latin-inspired colors, floral embroideries and feminine silhouettes, and were intrigued by the shorter hemlines, lighter constructions and sassy details (such as bathing-suit backs) that exuded urban energy. Tiers of ruffles appeared on several gowns, including a black taffeta number with a billowing train that closed the show. "I wanted to end with a grand

Copping's first resort collection for Oscar de la Renta debuted last spring.



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Oscar de la Renta in 2014. Yahoo's Marissa Mayer in Oscar de la Renta at the Metropolitan Museum of Art gala in May.

gesture," Copping says. "Oscar really loved grand gestures."

Copping says he wants to dress the same kind of woman de la Renta did. "She's confident and loves life and likes to be noticed when she walks into a room. She also understands quality and refinement, and can appreciate details."

Mazor, who has worked for the company for more than 45 years, acknowledges the designers' shared sensibility. "Oscar was my idol, and Peter is a modernized extension of Oscar. Our next step is a younger look. I actually feel younger just working with Peter."

At last month's Fashion on the Lake event at Lake Tahoe, Copping mingled effortlessly with the likes of **Marissa Mayer** and **Barbara Brown**. "Under Peter's direction, there's a buzz around the brand," says **Robert Arnold-Kraft**, vice president and general manager of Saks Fifth Avenue San Francisco, which sponsored the event. "He has done an amazing job engaging the Oscar de la Renta devotee [while resonating] with a large audience."

At the Saks event, Copping showed off some of his favorite looks: a dress whose laser-cut flowers create a stunning 3-D effect, and a sophisticated column dress contrastingly adorned with delicate pastel flowers. When asked what other fashion terrain he'd like to explore, Copping replied, "interiors," referring not to home décor, but to the lining of his clothes, "the part only the woman sees when she's dressing." What woman wouldn't be delighted to slide into one of Copping's silky dresses and discover a "secret" fabric sewn in purely for her amusement?

Copping seems genuinely amused by San Francisco. "I always leave here feeling energized," he says. "And there are some very chic, stylish women here. I would definitely love to spend more time in this city."

Copping's wish will be fulfilled next spring, when he returns for the March opening of André Leon Talley's Oscar de la Renta retrospective at the de Young. Meanwhile, this month in New York he's presenting his first spring collection.

Whatever the fashion world sees on Sept. 15, Copping says it will be "very true to the spirit of the house." But he feels it won't be until he's rolled out a pre-fall collection and completed a full fashion cycle that he will have gained clarity about where the brand is headed. And then? "I will probably continue to learn a lot from the past. But of course, I also want to keep moving forward." **NHG**

Maryann LoRusso is a San Francisco-based freelance journalist who writes about fashion, culture and lifestyle. She also edits an online magazine for women at redtypewriter.com.

To help you find that perfect Oscar de la Renta ensemble, contact **Susan Peganini**, Saks' Director of Personal Shopping, in the Fifth Avenue Club, 415-438-5311.