

## Ouimillie's Fashionably Late Debut

**By Erin Renzi**



*Photo: Courtesy of Erin Renzi. An Ouimillie model showcases pieces from Ouimillie's spring collection at the Liberty Hotel's fashion show.*

The Liberty Hotel lobby buzzes with anticipation. As the clock draws closer to 10 p.m., more guests begin to gather around the bar, sipping on espresso martinis and other extravagant cocktails. The DJ plays club versions of pop songs and when the music grows louder, strobe lights illuminate different areas of the room. The Fashionably Late fashion show, featuring Ouimillie boutique, is about to begin.

The Liberty Hotel in downtown Boston hosts Fashionably Late Thursdays, a series of fashion shows showcasing Boston-based designers and boutiques, every Thursday night from September through May, with one show in June to celebrate Pride Month. Formerly the Charles Street Jail

from 1851 until 1990 when the jail shutdown due to the violation of inmate's constitutional rights, the hotel possesses a rich history and an unlikely environment for displaying haute couture. However, the exposed brick and high ceilings make the perfect backdrop for one of Boston's fashion scenes key events.

With free admission for hotel guests and the public, the event provides an excuse to step away from the work week and enter a high-style alternate reality, if only for a few hours. Around 100 people attended Ouimillie's show; the COVID-19 pandemic slightly decreased the number of models and attendees, but the event remains popular.

Fashionably Late Thursdays benefit both the Liberty Hotel and the local designer or boutique that is featured. The hotel provides models through Dynasty Modeling Agency for the featured brands to choose from. Models showcase the designer or boutique's clothing for guests sitting in the hotel lobby and at the bar to see. The show comes at no cost to the designer or boutique; no fee is required to participate.

"One great advantage of designers participating in the show is that it's free marketing material [for them]," Claire Cipolla, the Liberty Hotel's public relations manager, said. She explained that designers or boutiques featured in the fashion shows pick the makeup looks and hairstyles the models wear.

"We just provide the framework and let the designers do the creative process," Cipolla said.

The event also brings more people through the doors of the Liberty Hotel. Someone who comes to watch a Fashionably Late Thursday might decide to purchase an espresso martini at the bar or grab a bite to eat before the show at one of the hotel's restaurants.

The show begins with four models strutting out onto the upper balcony and posing in each of its four corners. They rotate, take turns dramatically posing in each location, and go to the ground floor of the hotel. One by one, each model takes the escalator up to the main lobby and stands on tables giving guests a closer view of Ouimillie's newest clothing and accessories. Models sport mesh, sequins, and vibrant colors. Textures and patterns that typically clash look striking. The models disappear for an outfit change and strut back out to showcase new looks.

Ouimillie, a lifestyle boutique and design studio based in Boston, has three store locations. The flagship store sits on Charles Street parallel to the Charles River. Here customers will find the largest selection of inventory. Located in Cambridge on Huron Avenue lies the quaint boutique. West Hollywood in Los Angeles, California is home to Ouimillie's third and newest showroom.

At Ouimillie's boutique locations and online, guests can shop for clothing, shoes, and accessories from local designers based in New York and Boston and international designers from France, Italy, Belgium, and Denmark. Merchandise prices range from below \$100 to over \$1,000, but all the clothing and accessories exude a high-end and luxurious feel.

Ouimillie Boutique is the creation of interior designer Millicent Cutler. Her original vision was a boutique specializing in home goods, but her passion for fashion and success with selling jewelry, denim, and handbags led the brand to evolve. According to their website, “Every piece we carry allows us to share its designer's story and values.”

Cipolla selected Ouimillie as the featured boutique for the April 13 Fashionably Late event. She contacts and books the designers and boutiques featured in all shows, handles the pre-show marketing, and makes sure the lighting and music run smoothly once the models hit the runway.

Despite Cipolla becoming public relations manager just eight months ago, she knew Ouimillie had something special and deserved to be showcased at the Liberty Hotel. The quality of Ouimillie’s inventory and how they curate each new collection drew Cipolla to them.

“They take high pride in providing the trendiest looks of the season. I think that's really unique — providing such high quality, gorgeous, signature pieces in the age of fast fashion,” Cipolla said.

Cree Daniels, the head of Ouimillie’s social media and marketing, curated the looks in the fashion show. She focused on featuring items from the spring and summer lines of the brand’s Ouimillie carries but used a few older pieces as well.

“When we were deciding what kind of theme we wanted to do for this particular show, we decided to go into more of the clubby, bold, nighttime type looks that we don't always get to put together or show off,” Daniels explained.

Daniels believes Fashionably Late Thursdays left a positive effect on business for Ouimillie.

“We have had a couple of clients that will comment on social media and come into the store looking for the pieces that we showcased on Instagram,” she said.

Over the ten years that the Liberty Hotel has hosted Fashionably Late Thursdays, they have maintained a steady audience that enjoys returning to the hotel for a night filled with fashion-based entertainment that is hard to come by in Boston.

When 24-year-old fashion enthusiast Chloe Jensen moved to Boston two years ago after completing her undergraduate degree at Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island, she stumbled upon a Fashionably Late event while searching for fun yet affordable activities around the city.

“I saw that a boutique that I really liked was having a fashion show at the Liberty Hotel and dragged some friends to come with me,” Jensen said.

Jensen and her friends loved their first experience and appreciated how the show provided a different activity than sitting at one of their go-to bars in South Boston. To keep work from dominating the week, Jensen Fashionably Late shows when seeking fun on a weeknight.

Ouimillie's show was the first Fashionably Late event that Isabella Perry attended, and she said she would return for more. Perry hadn't heard of Ouimillie previously, but when the Liberty Hotel's Instagram page posted that they were to be the featured boutique, she was intrigued.

"I didn't know what I was expecting from the line itself, I don't think that really matters," Perry said. "The vibe is awesome. To see the clothes in this space is really cool."

Following the conclusion of the night, Perry sent her mom photos of the clothing and accessories Ouimillie featured. Her weekend plans include hitting the boutique on Charles Street and shopping for some of her favorite looks from the evening.

"Fashionably Late is not your average fashion show where people are just walking down the runway," Daniels said. "Ouimillie will for sure be back."