

## FASHION



JEAN ANNETTE SAULSBURY, an instructor with the San Francisco Academy of Art College, converses with student Indu Choraria.

Photos by BRETT PUTNAM — Staff

# FASHION ADVICE

**Oscar de la Renta tells graduating fashion design students to keep their eyes wide open**

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CONTRIBUTOR

**W**HEN Oscar de la Renta started making and selling clothes, most of his customers were women who put on one of his outfits to go out for lunch with the girls.

Today, most of his customers are professional women, the illustrious designer recently told a crowd of people waiting to see garments designed by graduates of San Francisco's Academy of Art College.

Constantly pleasing them, he says, takes some talent.

"To be a good fashion designer, you always have to keep your eyes open," de la Renta says.

Some 30 students who made their professional debut at the graduation fashion show are taking his advice.

Students hope that their homespun styles — made of fabrics such as mohair, silk and leather and inspired by buildings, blankets and lamps — are as famous as de la Renta's signature cocktail gowns and sophisticated suits.

A handful of the graduates, all in their 20s and 30s, say they found their artistic inspiration from East Bay classrooms and neighborhoods.

Quoc Lieu, who grew up in East Oakland, creates men's knitwear that borrows from the clean lines of architecture. His tightly-knit sweaters have three-dimensional panels, half-circles or interlocks that fit like puzzle pieces on the garment. Some of his designs are constructed with different colors of yarn knit on top of one each other, a technique called plating.

Lieu is one of 10 knitwear students from across



OSCAR DE LA RENTA watches graduating San Francisco Academy of Art College students show their designs at the school's spring fashion show.

the world accepted this year to London's Royal College of Art, where he'll work on a master's degree in art. Between now and the fall, he hopes to find a sponsor or scholarship to help pay the school's hefty tuition.

In an interview a week before the big show in San Francisco, he said he likes the creativity of original knitwear.

"Instead of fashion design where you go out and get fabric, you get to create your own fabric," he says.

Lieu credits his apparel class at Oakland High School with getting him interested in design. "Men's clothes are not that interesting — usually it's pants, shirts and sweaters."

He graduated with Chi Yee Jenny Wong, a San Leandro resident whose collection contains stark white peasant-style dresses, pleated skirts and tops cut on the bias. Wong says she was inspired by Roman warriors.

Emeryville's Joe Chen also features men's knitwear in his line. Chen works with designers from Espirit and Target on some of his knitwear swatches. Stephanie Silver of Berkeley shows a lavender suit jacket with printed leaves made by a technique called burnout. In this method, the designer uses chemicals to burn away fiber in a particular pattern.

In addition to being creative and attentive, de la Renta says another hallmark of good designer is one who is not only able to see the design, but knows how the final product will be put together.

A person exemplifying that skill is Daliyati Firdaus, a Fremont resident with a bachelor of fine



# Design: Students hope to put their fashions on the map

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arts degree in women's wear fashion design. She made every pattern and sewed every stitch of her senior collection.

"I want to draw something that I can actually construct myself," she says. One of her dresses, inspired by a paper Chinese lamp, has lines of bamboo sewn into it.

Indu Choraria of Emeryville can say the same thing. Her knitwear runs the gamut from a thick nubby dart-style knit to a fine, reverse jersey sprinkled with mohair and raffia, a straw-like paper material. On the runway, her pieces included tight-fitting, long-sleeved oatmeal-colored sweaters with ankle-length matching skirts.

Displaying her resume and

business card, Choraria pauses after being asked what she would like to do her background and education, which include working in the Indian fashion industry.

Her answer: "I would like to work for a company that lets me be creative and grow."

Although most all of the Academy of Art College students say they'd like to start out working at a small local company, most add that their goal is to see their name on their own line.

De la Renta's advice to the young designers: Start off by working for someone, but keep the original designs flowing by making clothes for friends.

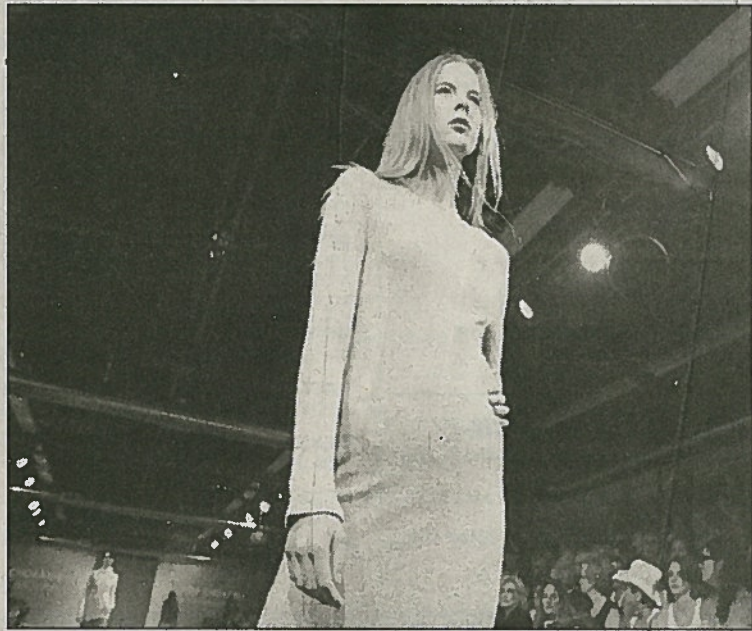
The Dominican Republic-born de la Renta was a couture assistant with the House of

Lanvin in Paris before he moved to New York in 1963 and began designing for Elizabeth Arden. In 1966, he launched a line under his own name, and expanded his company around the world. In 1993, he designed a couture line for the House of Balmain in Paris.

"Today, starting a business is an expensive proposition. My advice is to learn really how a fashion house runs . . . what it is all about," he says.

Someone asks him whether any of the young designers' styles at the show would be considered timeless 10, 20, or 30 years down the road. Admanantly, de la Renta says one cannot tell.

He adds, "Anyone who tries to predict fashion is a fool. We only have to think one year ahead, that is all."



BRET PUTNAM — Staff

A MODEL shows off a design by Emeryville native Indu Choraria.