

Architectural Photography - Ken Heyden

Textile fashion designer and 'Leading Woman Entrepreneur of the World' (Star Group USA, London April 1998), Zandra Rhodes' flair for design, fashion and art was evident at an early age. Born in Chatham, Kent in 1940, Zandra's mother, a fitter in a Paris fashion house, was by far the strongest influence in her childhood. An exotic woman, she dressed dramatically, courted hippie chic and punk and led the fashion runways with her brilliant textiles and hand-crafted designs.



David Humphries and Zandra Rhodes circa 1988

there ain't nothing like a  
dame







Following her studies at the Medway College of Art in Rochester, Kent, where her mother taught, Zandra was admitted to the Royal College of Art in 1961 where she studied textile design. Her early textile fashion designs were considered too outrageous by the traditional British manufacturers and in 1969 she established her own retail outlet in fashionable Fulham Road, West London. Only three years later, in 1972, Zandra Rhodes was awarded the first of many accolades she would receive in her lifetime. One of the new wave of British designers who put London at the forefront of the international fashion scene in the 1970s, Zandra established herself as a 'design force' to be reckoned with. In 1974 she was awarded Royal Designer for Industry and four years later was made a Fellow of the Society of Industrial Arts. Her 1986 Doctorates, from the Royal College of Art, Honoris Causa (DRCA), London, and from the International Fine Arts College, Honoris Causa (DFA), Miami, Florida, were followed in 1987 when Zandra Rhodes was awarded Doctor of Design (DD), Honoris Causa, by the Council for National Academic Awards, London. Adored and honoured on both sides of the Atlantic, she won the Alpha Award (1985) from Saks Fifth Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana for the 'Best Show of the Year'. But the jewel in her glittering crown came when she was made a Commander of the British Empire by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in 1997.

Zandra's lifestyle has proved to be as dramatic and glamorous as her extroverted designs. With her pink and sometimes radiant red hair, theatrical makeup and spectacular jewellery, she has stamped her identity on the international world of fashion.

Her designs have always been clear, creative statements; dramatic but graceful, bold yet feminine. Her garments have a timeless quality that makes each unmistakably a Rhodes creation. Zandra's inspiration has always been organic material and nature. Her innovative approach to the construction of garments can be seen in her use of reversed exposed seams and stylistic jewelled safety pins and tears during the punk era.

Zandra designed for the late Diana, Princess of Wales, and continues to design for royalty and the rich and famous around the world. She has a loyal cult following in the USA.

Now there is another door opening for her, a seven meter pink doorway to be precise. This is the entrance to The Fashion and Textile Museum and Zandra Rhodes Foundation, which will be opened by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II later in the year. The enormous pink and orange building finds the Fashion and Textile Museum a magnet for the fashion world. It's soaring space, exhibition plans, lively educational and community programmes, unique and pro-active attitude to the art and craft of clothing, have already brought a multitude of callers to its door. "Our dream of showing 20th and 21st century fashion and textile design, is one that many share. All efforts are now concentrated on readying the museum for its formal opening and focussing on funding and sponsorship", said Rhodes.

The Fashion and Textile Museum and Zandra Rhodes Foundation building was designed by Mexico's greatest modern architect Ricardo Legorreta. Renown through the America's for his modern interpretation of indigenous Mexican buildings, the introduction of this confronting edifice in South Bank strangely works. Set amongst the Edwardian and Victorian buildings of the 19th century, the building captures the very essence of Zandra Rhodes. The huge facade is burnt orange with accents of plum and, of course, Rhodes' signature fuchsia. The entrance boasts a jewellery box of a mosaic - a starburst of glass, marble and semi-precious stones by terrazzo artist David Humphries. The walls are brightest lapis. Further inside, walls of densely glowing shades - from marigold to flame, punctuate a predominantly white stone interior.

Zandra's partner Salah Hassanein, former Warner Bros International President, commissioned David Humphries to help Zandra realise her vision for the Museum's entrance hall. He saw the long-term ongoing artistic report between the two artists and realised the unique output a collaboration of this nature produces. Zandra, aware of the vast and precious pieces available at David's Sydney studio, visited him in Sydney especially to review the concepts, select materials and decorative elements and to further their collaboration. The stained glass used is very rare and originally produced in France over 50 years ago and is no longer made. Over the last five years Salah has seen David and Zandra work together to create and further extend the award winning terrace at their Del Mar beach house. It seems there is a formula here that simply works.

With a career which spans a period of more than 40 years Zandra has demonstrated a work ethic that can best be described as ferocious. "All efforts are now concentrated on readying the museum for its formal opening and focused on funding and sponsorship," said Rhodes. When the big pink doors are formally opened the world will be dazzled by the legacy that is quintessentially Zandra Rhodes.

Zandra's mission statement reads: To be the first in the United Kingdom dedicated to contemporary fashion and textiles, exhibiting, promoting and recording the works of outstanding designers from the 1950s to the present day.

To stimulate, encourage and inspire the study of fashion and textile design the museum will provide education and training at all levels together with workshops and textile print facilities. The Museum is committed to equal opportunity in providing learning to all sectors and to all countries.

To showcase costume and textile collections of all leading and upcoming designers including varied exhibitions devoted to fashion, textile print and related work.

To provide educational resources and to motivate the study of modern fashion and textiles of artistic, cultural and historic significance and to further the understanding of human beings within their social environment.

To be a landmark in the fast and changing area of Bermondsey contributing to the regeneration of London's South Bank."

Not only is the area of South Bank undergoing a renaissance, so is Zandra. I guess it's about 'giving something back'.

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If you would like to support the Fashion and Textile Museum, call Michelle Santoro on 0011 44 20 7403 0222