

ALFRED FIANDACA & HIS LEGACY

MassArt Fashion Collection

Sondra Grace
with *Kathleen McDermott* and *Sonja Czekalski*

Published in conjunction with launch
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online database containing samples of clothing, accessories
and textiles from the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries.

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Alfred Fiandaca & his legacy

MASSART FASHION COLLECTION

Alfred Fiandaca
1941 - 2013



ALFRED FIANDACA AND MASSART

by Sondra Grace

Fashion can be as friendly as a memorable outfit or as elusive as an image on the Internet.

The study of fashion design at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design was established in 1907, making MassArt's fashion design program one of the oldest in the United States.

For 30 years the Fashion Design Department at MassArt has built a collection of over 300 pieces of clothing, accessories and textiles through acquisitions and donations. In Spring 2021 students, faculty and staff worked on campus and remotely to document a selection of over 100 designs. Each look was researched and photographed in preparation for uploading to the MassArt Godine Library database.

To coincide with Boston Fashion Week, a digital preview entitled *Alfred Fiandaca and his legacy* | *MassArt Fashion Collection* is available on www.massart.edu. We're pleased to announce that a printed catalog of the *MassArt Fashion Design Archive – Then & Now* will be available this fall.

We're proud to share the story of MassArt alumnus Alfred Fiandaca. Fiandaca returned to the College in the 60s to teach in the Fashion Design Department soon after he opened his Newbury Street atelier. He was committed to teaching the MassArt students grand draping skills and to engaging them with couture techniques. Throughout the years as his celebrity clientele grew Fiandaca would always welcome MassArt students as interns into his workrooms in Boston, New York and Palm Beach.

Alfred Fiandaca is Boston's premier fashion artist and his world-wide recognition has opened the door for every fashion designer of Boston.

In 2000 MassArt presented FIANDACA – 40 YEARS OF FASHION in a tribute to Alfred and to celebrate Boston fashion along with establishing the Alfred Fiandaca Scholarship.

Alfred Fiandaca was a designer with a global following and yet remained Boston's own. Celebrities – Audrey Hepburn and Susan "All My Children's Erica Kane" Lucci wore his designs. Louise Fletcher accepted her Academy Award in a Fiandaca gown. Alfred was the favorite designer of Joan Kennedy, Janet Langhart Cohen and Ann Romney. He designed a suit worn by Alexis Carrington in the *Dynasty* television show and a kicky molten silver dress worn to the 25th anniversary of the Boston Ballet. Many of his pieces show Fiandaca's love affair with color.

The MassArt Fashion Design Archive collection includes over 50 Fiandaca designs with the first coming from the designer himself. Fiandaca donated one of his signature designs, a gown with high/low hemline in silk charmeuse green and pink floral print and bolero jacket embellished with sequins. It represents a wonderful balance of proportion, color and fabrics that he created using grand luxe techniques.

We greatly appreciate the generosity of donors who consigned their Fiandaca designs to MassArt to be used for study by our students.

MassArt is honored to recognize Fashion Design alumnus, master teacher, patron and friend Alfred Fiandaca.

ALFRED FIANDACA BOSTON’S PREMIER DESIGNER

by *Kathleen McDermott*

Throughout his long career, Fiandaca outfitted style leaders across America and unerringly captured the chic moment. Despite Boston’s relative distance from the centers of fashion, Fiandaca’s success made the case for our city’s relevance in dress. His designs aligned with mainstream American fashion history and women’s history. In 2000 I conducted his oral history interview and wrote the interpretive documentation for MassArt’s retrospective exhibition *Fiandaca: Forty Years of Fashion - 1960 to 2000* – reproduced here.

Today, even as we embrace wider representation in our fashion designers, we continue to celebrate Fiandaca’s style and cultural leadership.

1960: Wife Dressing

“In the early 1960s, I dressed women who were ‘possessions’,” recalled Alfred Fiandaca in a recent interview. “My women wore my clothes as the flags of their husband’s wealth, as if to say ‘This is my wife. This is how wealthy I am.’”

American fashion designer Anne Fogarty’s 1959 book, *Wife-Dressing*, confirms Fiandaca’s recollection. Fogarty, known for her extremely fitted bodices and tight waists, cautioned women to remember that “it’s your husband for whom you are dressing.” Not only would dressing well please one’s husband, but also a wife’s appearance could help his career, “especially when promotions to high-echelon jobs are in the offing.”

1963: Body Armor

Creating the curvy and womanly Marilyn Monroe body type of the early 1960s required industrial strength foundational garments. Intricate and strong circular stitching shaped bra cups into missile-like points. Heavy pull-on girdles with elastic panels cinched the waist, flattened the stomach, and smoothed the hips. Stocking garters held up one’s nylons.

Clothes were “like armor – so structured and strictly tailored that you could stand a skirt up on the floor by itself,” recalled Fiandaca. “My garments were lined and interlined and backed with canvas. Featherstitching maintained the shape and rigidity.”

1964: Boston Proper

In the early 1960s, Fiandaca recalled, women abided by inflexible rules, set forth in advice manuals, that governed appropriate dress for particular times and places. During the day, women wore knee-length dresses or suits for morning meetings and luncheons, and cocktail dresses for early evening. An 8 p.m. dinner or show required floor-length dresses with covered necklines, and one only wore décolleté evening or ball gowns after 10 p.m. Tea dances and waltz evenings at the Ritz required full-skirted dresses whose “tea-length” or mid-calf hemlines allowed greater freedom of movement. “And no woman *dreamed* of going out,” he said, “without a hat, white gloves, and matching shoes and handbag.”

1967: Youthquake

In 1963, American Vogue takes notice of Mary Quant’s miniskirts sold from Quant’s “boutique” on the King’s Road in London; by the second half of the decade, the miniskirt becomes a pop culture phenomenon. Her simple dresses are young in feeling and allow for freedom of movement; new undergarments called “bodystockings” and “pantyhose” are invented.

In 1967, Fiandaca introduces his “boutique line” to supplement his couture collection. “Up until now,” writes the *Boston Record-American* in September of that year, Fiandaca “catered only to the couture group, but [he is] now looking toward the younger set as well.” The two collections are distinguished by price as well as design philosophy: “simplicity and elegance of line for the couture fashion and daring for the boutique.”

1968: The Peacock Revolution

In 1964, the Beatles arrive for their American tour wearing the artistic dandy or “mod” style from London’s Carnaby Street. The deep collars, wide ties, and bright colors worn by the “Fab Four” prompt a “Peacock Revolution” in men’s fashion. In 1968, they visit their guru in India, and inspire another wave of male fashion, based this time on Indian garments and jewelry.

In 1968, the *Boston Record-American* photographs 28-year-old Fiandaca in a gray flannel “rajah suit . . . worn over a pearl turtleneck” with

a silver beaded necklace. He also presents a glen plaid jumpsuit with matching cape, an op-art geometric jumpsuit, and Edwardian waistcoats for those men for whom clothes are, he said, “a badge of rebellion.”

1969: Battle of the Hemlines

The 1969-70 Fall/Winter Paris collections introduce a new, longer length called the “midi.” Life magazine reports on the development with a cover article entitled “The Great Hemline Hassle.” “The latest word is long,” Life complains, but “many women and all men hate to see the Mini go.” By 1971, Boutique Fiandaca displays mostly mid-length fashions. At the same time, the designer is reported by the *Boston Record-American* to be the first to offer hot pants in the city. These sporty new fashions, such as Fiandaca’s satin, one piece, shorts jumpsuit, are already seen “at the ballet, restaurants, and private weekend society bashes.”

1970s: Designer Decade

During the 1970s, designer names and labels add an important status element to everyday garments, from blue jeans to sunglasses. Fiandaca designs uniforms for corporate clients throughout the decade, including a hot pants and tunic set for Northeast Airlines and blue empire dresses with a bolero for State Street Bank. He will go on to do work for the CIA, designing top secret clothing for agents “on assignment.”

1976: Celebrity Fashion

The 1975 movie “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest,” starring Jack Nicholson and Louise Fletcher, sweeps the Oscars with awards for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Actor, and Best Actress.

Fiandaca designs a dress for Louis Fletcher to wear to the Academy Awards ceremony. Fletcher, who tells the press that she has given up Yves St. Laurent for Fiandaca, is just one of a long list of his celebrity clients in the 1970s. Raquel Welch, for example, requests an outfit that is both businesslike and sexy. Fiandaca responds by creating a classic black wool suit with a soft pink—and completely backless—silk blouse. Other celebrity clients include Connie Francis, Lauren Bacall, Jayne Meadows, Audrey Meadows, Nancy Sinatra, Julie Andrews, Dionne Warwick, Shelley Winters, Joan Rivers, Stephanie Mills, Cher, Oprah Winfrey, Janet Langhart Cohen, Natalie Jacobson, and Susan Lucci.

1977: Equality in Dress

As a result of equal opportunity laws passed in the early 1970s, women flood into business, management, the professions, and university teaching.

In 1977, John T. Molloy publishes his *Women’s Dress for Success Book*, advising women to adopt the timeless “business uniform” of the “highly tailored, dark colored, traditionally designed, skirted suit.”

“In the 1970s, I began to hate the fact that my clothes would have to be obsolete,” recalled Fiandaca in a recent interview. “I remember one beautiful suit with a classic black jacket and a skirt of red and black plaid. After I put my life and love into it, was my client really supposed to discard it next year? I thought, something’s wrong here. I’m wearing the suit I wore last year – why can’t she? Women needed to be equal.”

1982: Power Suits

The *Boston Globe* describes Fiandaca’s 1982 collection as “luxurious designs of suits, coats and dress, all hand stitched and hand cut,” using the finest fabric and construction. His expensive suits, which require sophisticated and subtle tailoring, are popular with celebrities and style conscious, and lend sensuality and power to those who wear them. Like Giorgio Armani, who appears on the cover of *Time* magazine in April 1982 to herald the worldwide triumph of his “power suit,” Fiandaca symbolizes timeless style. “Clean, classical designs,” Fiandaca says at the time, “represent a long-term investment.”

1985: Looking Rich

The first half of the 1980s glorifies conspicuous consumption and high status possessions. Television programs focusing on the real and imagined lives of wealthy people, such as “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous,” “Dallas,” and “Dynasty” are enormously popular with the American public. Fiandaca designs a dress for Joan Collins to wear on the “Dynasty” show. At the time, it is the most expensive outfit ever commissioned by television. The suit dress, which costs \$3,200, appears on the air for only three and a half minutes.

1986: Opulent Evenings

Opulent and luxurious evening clothes emerge, along with power suits, as the other high fashion esthetic of the 1980s. In 1985, Vivienne Westwood shows the “mini-crini,” a short bouffant skirt supported by collapsible hoops. The following year, Christian Lacroix creates a sensation with his “Pouf” dress, spread over a hoop or bustle, festooned with garlands, fringe, and ribbons, and available in startling color mixes like tangerine and ice pink. These dresses will inspire Tom Wolfe to write, in his 1987 satiric novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities*: “This season no puffs, flounces, pleats, ruffles, bibs, bows, scallops, laces, darts or shirrs on the bias were too extreme.”

Fiandaca unveils a \$6,600 white organza evening suit embroidered with “real 14-karat gold thread and tiny gold bullion beads.” He is increasingly known as a master of “fantasy night looks” gowns that envelop women in petals of crinkled tissue taffeta or multi-layered chiffon, for example, and others that shower their wearers in glittering beads and sequins.

1987: The Bubble Bursts

The stock market crash of 1987 ends a five-year boom. Consumers become skittish, a recession looms, and a new attitude of austerity replaces the conspicuous spending and excess of the 1980s. The Pouf dress collapses, and a new era of restraint and avoidance of overt fashion extravagance begins.

In 1989, Fiandaca shows long, mid-calf length dresses with minimized shoulders instead of the broad, padded shoulders that had been popular since the beginning of the decade. A “more natural line” is emerging, he tells a local newspaper. “Dynasty” went off the air, and so did shoulder pads—without the reruns.”

1990: Retail Revolution

Competition from off-price, discount, and factory outlet stores, along with ill-advised management decisions and junk bond financing, leads to the disappearance of many old and well-established regional department stores.

“My wholesale business used to be the biggest proportion of my work,” Fiandaca recalled recently. “Years ago we had wonderful stores all across the United States, in Houston, Nashville, and Cleveland, for example. They would buy my entire collection and pay for me to come for three days and do fashion shows and events. But as the structure of the industry changed, it became important to open my own stores. It is my way of reaching and knowing my clients. Retailing – at my New York, Palm Beach, and Boston stores – is now the biggest part of my business.”

1992: High Tech for High Comfort

High performance sportswear materials such as acrylic fleece, parachute cloth, and polyurethane invade the traditional wardrobe. Stretch Lycra and Spandex graduate from the ski slope, pool, and gym and are added to traditional woven fabrics to bring greater comfort to tailored clothing. “Stretchable fabrics allow more freedom of movement,” Fiandaca explains to the Houston Post in 1992, and “accommodate more active lives.” He uses Lycra throughout his fall collection, blending it with wool gabardine in several suits.

He also makes a point of choosing fabrics that “give,” such as georgette, mousseline, chiffon, crepe, and stretchable wool and lace.

1995: Timeless

Juliet Schor’s best-selling 1992 book, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*, uses government data to show that Americans are spending more time at work and finding it increasingly difficult to maintain a balance between work and family obligations.

“Adults live such multi-faceted lives today that they don’t have the time or interest to shop for some ‘trendy outfit,’ ” Fiandaca observes in the mid-1990s. “Building my collections from one season to another” and designing more and more “evening separates” helps busy clients. “A woman can wear a new top with a long skirt” from a previous collection. “Or a new blouse with silk slacks.”

2000: Fashion Design and Personal Style

At the dawn of the new millennium, individuality is the fashion buzzword. “Bricolage,” a French term borrowed from postmodernist theory, is used to describe the way 21st century people choose from different fashion styles and eras to create their own unique look. Fashion options abound in everything from skirt lengths to silhouette. It is all about the wearer’s choice—not only what to wear but how to wear it.

“Today’s successful designer interprets the lives of the women for whom he designs,” explains Fiandaca at the end of the twentieth century. “It is what they want to wear. Dior’s New Look could never take place today. It is not like in the past when fashion dictated to women. Today, a woman can have her hemline anywhere she wants. If a designer wants it at a certain length, let him wear it.”

Research and References:

Primary Sources: Alfred Fiandaca recalled his career in an extended and invaluable video history interview at MassArt on September 27, 2000. He also made available press clippings and other materials that encompassed his entire career from 1958 to the present.

Secondary Sources:

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Alfred Fiandaca, dress, 1988 | English net, metallic lace | Gift of Barbara Quiroga, 2013 - 054



Alfred Fiandaca, dress, 1990s
Silk crepe chiffon
Gift of Lucille Spagnuolo,
2018 - 158



Alfred Fiandaca, gown, 2012
Silk chiffon
Gift of Lucille Spagnuolo,
2018 - 131



Alfred Fiandaca, suit ensemble, 1990s | Wool crepe and silk satin georgette | Gift of Tobey Oresman, 2014 - 219



Alfred Fiandaca, dress, 1980s
Silk crepe chiffon
Gift of Lucille Spagnuolo,
2018 - 051



Alfred Fiandaca, gown, 1990s
Silk chiffon, tissue silk
Gift of Lucille Spagnuolo,
2018 - 043



Alfred Fiandaca, dress, 1970s | Linen | Gift of Lucille Spagnuolo, 2018 - 121



Alfred Fiandaca, suit, 2000s | Linen and lamb fur | Gift of Belle Ribicoff, 2014 - 291



*Alfred Fiandaca, dress
and shawl, 1990s*
Silk chiffon
Gift of Lucille Spagnuolo,
2018 - 245





Alfred Fiandaca, bolero jacket, 1990s | Silk lame, bugle and rocaïlle beads | Gift of Tobey Oresman, 2014 - 315



Alfred Fiandaca,
blouse, 1970s
Silk satin
Gift of Lucille Spagnuolo,
2018 - 375

Alfred Fiandaca, dress ensemble, 1980s
Silk chiffon, metallic embroidery
Gift of Lucille Spagnoulo,
2013 - 322



Alfred Fiandaca, jacket, 1980s
Silk garbardine
Gift of Lucille Spagnuolo,
2018 - 175



Alfred Fiandaca, blouse, 1980s
Silk voile
Gift of Lucille Spagnuolo,
2018 - 178



LUCILLE SPAGNUOLO LIFELONG FRIEND, CUSTOMER AND COWORKER

interviewed by *Sonja Czekalski*

Lucille admired the pride Fiandaca took in each of his designs. She began shopping at Fiandaca's store on Newbury Street in Boston in the very early 70s. From then on, every year for her birthday, her parents would buy her a custom Fiandaca dress. Decades later, after her youngest son turned sixteen, Fiandaca asked Lucille to work for him. Since she no longer had to run her children's carpool, she accepted.

Describing her style as consistently "age appropriate, contemporary designer" Lucille was drawn to the contemporary colors and patterns, sophisticated silhouettes, and comfortable materials Fiandaca always chose to work with. Known for his luscious silks, fuchsia pinks, and hand stitched embroidery, Lucille notes that she "always felt great in his clothes because of comfort and style." As a working mother also attending lunches, after-school activities, fundraisers, and dinners, she chose to wear Fiandaca's designs for their functionality and versatility.

When speaking with Lucille she reminisced about having him dress her daughters at their weddings, fixing their garments until the minute they walked down the aisle to ensure everything was perfect. He did the same with his models before every runway show. She says "because his works were beautifully made, they made you feel beautiful."

Alfred Fiandaca was known for being able to read the true sense of his clients wants, needs, style, and body type. He was able to observe and sketch the perfect fit for his client's figure, then would welcome them to choose the fabrics that best fit their persona. Lucille Spagnuolo recalls he "could work with anyone and make them feel terrific."

Alfred and Lucille at her daughter's wedding in Venice, Italy

CAROLINE COLLINGS BUSINESS PARTNER FOR OVER 30 YEARS

interviewed by *Sonja Czekalski*

They were each other's favorite coworkers and dates to the ballet. In the mid 70s Caroline Collings was reading an article in the Sunday Boston Globe about an up and coming Boston Designer Alfred Fiandaca. She loved the featured designs in the article as "everything made sense and was wearable with great fabric." Caroline was looking for an American designer to wear while in Europe on her husband's business trips; she decided to go to Fiandaca's atelier on Newbury Street. She did not want to compete with the "label snobs" in Europe; she wanted to represent her own state, country, and personality. Fiandaca went to work on some cocktail dresses and Caroline still laughs at the shock on Parisian's faces when she said her clothes were "from Boston."

Caroline described her style as conservative with a flair. From her "best dressed" days as a college student, to her time teaching fine arts, then working with Fiandaca, and even now as a "grandma Uber driver." She fell in love with Fiandaca's designs because the pieces could easily be matched together and they were comfortable to wear. When getting dressed, she can always hear her mother's voice echoing "it takes the same amount of time to put something nice on as it does to put just anything on." She also always said "If you're organized, you can always look fabulous." Caroline loves to be able to quickly match pants and a shirt from her Fiandaca collection then being able to pair it with an eccentric handmade scarf for "something that will always stand out."

Caroline says that wearing Fiandaca is "wearing love, you knew you looked good because he was honest in his tailoring, fabric choices, and opinion... he would tell you if you looked like a sack of potatoes. Everything he made was wearable with great fabric and stitched with love."

She remembers her time working with Fiandaca as working with her "Fiandaca family." She recalls Alfred saying he never worked a day in his life. Then he would retrace his steps and say "okay, maybe I worked 3 days." On Alfred and Caroline's 25th anniversary of being business partners, Alfred called her and said "We've lasted as business partners longer than most marriages, honey bunny." Over the years they designed for all sorts of people, the Democrats, the Republicans, the Romneys and the Kennedys. Caroline said it made no difference who they were dressing, their job was to make people look good and feel good.

Caroline and Alfred



Alfred Fiandaca, gown, 2000
Silk taffeta and velvet
Gift of Lucille Spagnuolo,
2013 - 441



Alfred Fiandaca, dress, 1990s | Silk chiffon | Gift of Lucille Spagnuolo, 2018 - 443



Alfred Fiandaca,
skirt and top, 1990s
Silk chiffon
Gift of Kim Barrett estate,
2021 - 135



Alfred Fiandaca, gown and bolero
jacket, 1988
Silk charmeuse, sequins and beads
Gift of Alfred Fiandaca and Caroline
Collings, 2000 - 255



Alfred Fiandaca, skirt, blouse, belt, 1990s | Silk satin, peau de sole and seed beads | Gift of Caroline Collings, 2000 – 458