



Zandra Rhodes (center) poses with Distinguished Speaker Series underwriter Judy White (left), and La Jolla Community Center executive director Nancy Walters.



Rhodes takes questions and explains her hand-printed fabric process using sample gowns from many of her collections.

## *The Perfect Fit* For Zandra, all Rhodes lead to fashion

### Designer shares career highs at La Jolla Community Center

BY ELISABETH FRAUSTO

La Jolla Community Center began its 2020 Distinguished Speaker Series on March 3 with an evening presentation by international fashion icon Zandra Rhodes, who colored the program with her stories about decades in the industry. The event, which boasted a registered 84 attendees, kicks off a series the Community Center believes will be its best yet.

After a welcome reception — during which pink confections were served in homage to Rhodes' signature bright pink hair bob — guests took their seats to listen to her talk, "My Life in Fashion," which featured images chronicling her career, punctuated by personal stories.

The captivated audience listened as Rhodes, who lists Barbra Streisand, Freddy Mercury, Princess Diana and many other celebrities among her clients and who still designs today, detailed her beginnings in London. Deemed "the princess of punk" from the period when

she infused haute couture with street punk design, Rhodes recounted being influenced by a variety of sources, including Andy Warhol in the 1960s.

"I was told I was too extreme," she said, but she persevered despite being called "outrageous."

After completing collections — including quilted caftans, dinosaur coats and other pieces that "don't seem extreme now but were in 1969" — Rhodes moved to the United States, finding a stronger audience for her pieces. As her style gained traction, Rhodes gained global presence, showing in *British Vogue* and other international publications, and department stores like Saks and Neiman Marcus.

#### Global influences

Rhodes said she often replicated patterns and images collected from her travels around the world in her collections. In America, she remembered, she was overwhelmed by Native American designs, which heavily influenced the feathered caftans she started producing. Other photos revealed a near travel journal in clothing: sombrero designs in a dress she created after a trip to Mexico, India-inspired saris, Greek-like pleated turbans and countless other globally-chic creations.

# LA JOLLA LIGHT



The welcome reception sees Zandra Rhodes (center) with excited guests, some of whom tinted their hair to match the fashion designer's iconic look.



Rhodes talks fashion with a full house at La Jolla Community Center, March 3.

PHOTOS BY ELISABETH FRAUSTO

"I painted all the fabric myself," she told her audience, a practice she continues today. "This is what sets my creations apart from others," she explained. "In a world where three-fourths of fabrics are computer-printed, mine are always hand-printed."

The presentation continued as Rhodes showcased highlights from her 60-plus year career, which include 1) her Fashion Textile Museum in London, now an exhibit space that features the designer's "rainbow penthouse" at the top; 2) her collection with Valentino, which incorporated one of her first designs, she said; and 3) her work with the San Diego Opera. Rhodes has designed costumes for several productions, and underscored those for the 2000-2001 run of "The Magic Flute," which opened to an audience in pink wigs.

"However, the best show of my life was at the Museum of Contemporary Art here in La Jolla," she sighed. The 1979 exhibit featured chiffon forests and choreographed dancers, and several listeners nodded in agreement at the shared memory.



PHOTOS BY ELISABETH FRAUSTO

Several of Rhodes' fabrics are on display, along with two of her books.

After her slideshow ended, Rhodes took questions from the audience that ranged from inquiries about her favorite fabric ("silk chiffon; it's great to print on"), her favorite color ("well, pink's very useful"), and more.

To those wondering how the designer stands the test of time, Rhodes acknowledged: "Fashion is difficult. You get lucky, and you don't admit it."

Rhodes received a standing ovation and then milled about to sign copies of her latest book, "Zandra Rhodes: 50 Fabulous Years in Fashion."

## About the series

The event was the first in a series of eight Distinguished Speakers presentations for 2020, which Community Center executive director Nancy Walters says will bring seven more "high-profile individuals to La Jolla." Scheduled through October, the speakers range from neuropsychiatrists to comedians to Elaine LaLanne, who will speak about fitness and longevity.

Walters told the *Light*: "It's exciting for us to be able to provide this kind of event for our members, who are always seeking something new. These presentations bring us learning and inspiration, and follow the Community Center's goal to provide programming for adults and seniors that promotes active aging."

Walters pointed out that Community Center member Judy White has generously underwritten the series.

■ **UP NEXT:** Dr. Dilip Jeste, a geriatric neuropsychiatrist and director of UC San Diego's Center for Healthy Aging will speak about his San Diego-based research on loneliness in seniors, the role of wisdom and his suggestions on interventions for loneliness, 5 p.m. Tuesday, April 14 at the Community Center, 6811 La Jolla Blvd. The event is free and open to the public with advance registration by calling (858) 459-0831. For more information about activities, visit [ljcommunitycenter.org](http://ljcommunitycenter.org) ♦