

Christopher Lepine  
Nov. 30, 2000  
LaFleur Feature (1147 words)

For Associate Professor Rosetta LaFleur, creativity permeates life. It fills her personal world as well as her many roles in the department of consumer studies at the University. Dr. LaFleur's expertise focuses on fashion merchandising. She's always quick to use and give inspiration wherever and whenever she can.

LaFleur's clothing ideas, for example, use several sources. Sitting in her office, she explains. "For me, it's the fabric. I like textiles. I like the idea of looking at a design on a piece of fabric and saying, 'O.K. If I put a design line here, how will it change the look of that fabric?'"

Fabric and an admiration for artwork helped LaFleur win the award of "Outstanding Faculty Designer" for 2000 from the International Textile and Apparel Association at a recent conference in Cincinnati, Ohio (see related article). The elegant dress design, "Metallic Fan," is made for a young, slender woman. From the top, it displays a bare back and shoulders, uses spaghetti straps, has metallic fabric gathered in the form of a fan at the bust, and ends with a flowing skirt.

LaFleur bought the fabric for the winning design over 10 years ago. "At that time it was something that just attracted my attention," she says, holding up the lightweight dress. "I liked the sheerness of it. I liked the metallic yarns running through it. I had no idea what I would do with it." The next spark came from Paris while LaFleur was visiting the Louvre and admiring the work of Edgar Degas. "I was just inspired by the ballet dancers and the lightness," she says.

And, there are other sources.

In Baton Rouge, La., LaFleur grew up with her mother, two sisters and two brothers. She picked up textile and design skills by watching her mother's considerable amount of sewing. Things took a turn when Rosetta graduated from high school. "When I got up in the morning it was time to register for summer school at Southern University," she laughs. "I hadn't planned to register, but my mom had gone some place and she wrote me a note: 'This is your registration and fee for summer school.' That's all she said. I took the money, and I went and registered." LaFleur majored in textiles and clothing. She next went to Louisiana State University where she earned her masters, and then to the University of Tennessee for her doctorate.

Her early years shaped her style. "I think I'm two different people," she says. "Inside the classroom I'm very serious, no nonsense; get to the point. I have a plan when I go in there. By golly, we're going to get it done. Outside the classroom, I have a softer side. I think it shows in my advisement. There are some students who might not like me in the classroom, but want me to be their adviser."

Shannon Blake, 22, a former student now working at QVC in West Chester, Pa., remembers her first day of class: "She handed out comments that students had written about her on her review from last year," Blake says. "It was really quite an attention-getter. It was almost intimidating. She wasn't shy about it at all. She just sat up there looking at us as we were reading them. She was pretty much doing it to tell us what we had to prepare for."

LaFleur joined the University of Delaware in 1983 as part of the department of consumer studies. Today she teaches several classes, primarily "Advanced Textiles" and "Advanced Fashion Merchandising." She also helps students get a taste of the fashion world. Once or twice a semester, she arranges visits to New York City for them to spend time with merchandising and fashion industry experts. She also sets up internships in New York and Paris as well. This gives them a taste of their future work and informs their training at the University, according to LaFleur. "We want to keep pace with what's going on so that once the students graduate, they are prepared," she says.

In addition, Professor LaFleur is faculty liaison for a program with the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, a leading four-year state school with degrees in art and design and business and technology. University of Delaware consumer studies students can do three years at the University and one year at F.I.T. LaFleur advises students and oversees their educational process with F.I.T. Karen Stein, University of Delaware consumer studies department chair, explains, “Perhaps her greatest impact is being director of our liaison program with the Fashion Institute of Technology. She counsels students and keeps in touch with them while they’re there so a piece of Delaware travels with them.”

LaFleur believes that her roles of instructor, adviser, and designer require creative ideas that need tending. “But it doesn’t always have to be nurtured by working on the idea,” she says. She will often leave a project alone and switch to another activity such as gardening or golf. “You can plant it in your mind as a seed,” she says. “Go away. Then come back to it. If you want to maintain creativity in your life, try to focus on things outside of what you might consider your world.”

Her approach to life mixes with this methodology. LaFleur has a long-term view of life. “This too shall pass,” she says. “I have a bright outlook. The next day is going to be different. I know things will eventually work out.”

“I really want students to be successful,” she says. “I want them to feel that once they leave the University that they are well-prepared and can compete with anybody out there.” Stein feels that LaFleur’s greatest contribution is her connection with students. “Her impact really has to do with the personal relationships that she forms with our students,” she stressed.

During the winter session of 1999, Josette Moore, 22, now working at McCalls magazine in New York, remembers shopping with LaFleur in Paris at a street market. “Professor LaFleur took three of us. She knew exactly where to go and what to buy and how to bargain. It was remarkable to see how comfortable she was in the city. From that perspective we didn’t look at her as our teacher.”

On the last day of LaFleur's advanced fashion merchandising class, she takes a picture of each student. She asks everyone to keep the pictures, and after they graduate, send them back with notes about where they ended up and how they are doing. LaFleur smiles and shows a department bulletin board filled with the faces and notes from the students of her classes. She reads the employer names: Tommy Hilfiger, Guess, Richard Tyler, McCalls, Bloomingdale's, Saks Fifth Avenue, to name a few. It's a long list.

Sometimes students need a firm hand, sometimes a soft voice. Rosetta LaFleur will be here to give both.

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Christopher Leine  
Nov. 21, 2000  
LaFleur Design Award (357 words)

The International Textile and Apparel Association recently gave Rosetta LaFleur, Ph.D., the award of “Outstanding Faculty Designer” for 2000 at its annual conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, I.T.A.A. officials said.

LaFleur, associate professor in the department of consumer studies at the University, received the award for her dress design, “Metallic Fan,” at the conference, Nov. 8 – 11. An independent panel of fashion industry experts made a final review of her work at the event along with submissions from other I.T.A.A. members who are faculty at institutions worldwide.

Conference attendees watched models wearing the competing designs walk down the runway. The award was announced as the model wearing LaFleur’s design came out. “We were just chatting away,” LaFleur said. “When mine came out, I wasn’t paying much attention. Then, all of a sudden, everybody just turned around and started clapping. My heart was a flutter. ‘Oh my gosh! I pulled it off,’ I said.”

The industry review panel recognized LaFleur for her significant research, interpretation of current and historical styles, and technical patterning and construction techniques for the design.

LaFleur’s design began with inspiration from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

While in Paris a couple years ago, LaFleur visited the Louvre. She was admiring several paintings by Edgar Degas. “I was just inspired by the ballet dancers and the lightness,” she said. “When I came back, I was trying to think about what I could do.”

Although LaFleur's area of emphasis is in fashion merchandising, she often designs clothing. She decided to enter the competition after teaching a course involving CAD design. "I became a little bit more interested in not only seeing how the designs were done, but actually doing them myself," she said.

The winning design is an elegant formal dress created for a young woman, age 16 –25. It includes double layers of crisp metallic plaid polyester organza, tricolor nylon, cotton batise, gold buttons, and gold beads. It has a "fan" made from folded material at the bust line, creates bare shoulders and back, and uses a waistband.

The "Metallic Fan" design was modeled by a former student of LaFleur's, Joesette Nicole Amour, now working at McCall's magazine.

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