

# World Famous Designer, Oscar de la Renta Creates Excitement by Visit

by Debra Brown

“Elegant, clean-cut, handsome and warm”. Those were the impressions created by the world renowned designer, Oscar de la Renta, on a recent visit to St. Thomas. There was genuine excitement as he mingled with guests at a fashionable reception held to welcome him to St. Thomas’ business community. He displayed a warmth and genuine friendliness that is reflected in his ability to design clothes and concoct perfumes that appeal to many women of all economic levels.

Oscar de la Renta was born in the Dominican Republic 60 years ago and migrated to the United States in the early 1960s. Prior to going to the U.S. mainland, he spent vacations on St. Thomas several times. “In fact, he adds, “I waited for my green card between here and Puerto Rico”. He stayed at Bluebeards Castle and the Shibui back then and remarked on the enormous changes to the islands since that time. He told of his first experience in drinking Pina Colada. He enjoyed it so much, he ordered several drinks of it one morning, not knowing that it contained alcohol, and found himself quite inebriated very early in the day. He had fond memories of staying in St. Thomas before finally moving to the United States.

He later moved to Spain where he attended the Academie of San Fernando, to study Art. His original interest was to study art and it wasn’t until he showed some of his sketches to well-known designer Balenciaga, that he was encouraged to become a designer. Later, he would work for Lanvin and Elizabeth Arden. He was greatly influenced by Balenciaga. Balenciaga, he feels, is a great craftsman, and his influence is reflected in the design of Oscar de la Renta.

Oscar de la Renta was the first American designer to show a collection in Paris. He won a standing ovation from the international press at his Paris debut of his Fall 1991

collection. Now he has shows in New York and Paris. Although enthused with the reception his Paris show received, Oscar de la Renta says, “naturally, I will continue to show in New York where the pres-



OSCAR DE LA RENTA

tige of my American shows is so gratifying and, after all, that is where it all began.” “To have a successful business you have to have global business”. When he first started designing, he designed for the women of leisure and money. Today, his designs are for the active woman, clothes that are practical and versatile. Oscar de la Renta has gone on record saying he “adores women.”

Oscar de la Renta returned to the Virgin Islands this time to promote his new fragrance, Volupte’. His signature fragrance, it is now a best-selling prestige fragrance in 50 countries and won the prized Fragrance Foundation Award in 1978 for best women’s packaging, and is recog-

nized industry-wide as a true timeless classic. When he created Volupte’, he wanted to be sure that it would not be a fragrance that would compete with his first fragrance.

Volupte’ is a fragrance for the women of the nineties. It is a sensual fragrance with a blend of floral oriental, and a surprise twist of fruit notes that make up its aura. It took two and one half years to develop and market. He wanted to create a fragrance that would glorify women. Volupte’, pleasure to all the senses, is a name that was inspired by the Baudelaire poem, L’Invitation au Voyage. This is a fragrance so different that he wanted to create a perfume bottle that would reflect its aura. The flacon is exquisite in its appearance. It is a smooth, rounded glass with a green caochan top that looks like an emerald. The bottle was designed by famed perfume bottle designer, Pierre Duner and was the result of Oscar de la Renta’s love for an Emerald stone that he borrowed from a friend many years before. “Volupte’ is more than a fragrance, it is a state of being...that moment of absolute pleasure when all the senses are aroused and the spirit is liberated”.

This famed creator of beautiful clothing and exciting fragrances has another side to him that is most endearing. Oscar de la Renta supports an orphanage in Santo Domingo, where he was born. The orphanage is the home to 350 children. He was recently honored as one of the country’s most distinguished citizens. But most importantly is the warmth with which the designer describes the children of the orphanage. “to look at the child’s face and see a smile, that is the biggest reward”.

Oscar de la Renta and his wife of three years recently adopted an eight-year-old boy from the orphanage. When asked, whether he will visit the Virgin Islands again, he replied that usually when he thinks of taking a vacation these days, he goes home to his island. However, who knows. Maybe he will come back again. ■