THE LIFE AND CAREER OF FASHION DESIGNER, GEORGE STAVROPOULOS

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ABSTRACT

George Stavropoulos, a New York fashion designer, built a multi-million dollar business on his signature, floating chiffon dresses. His self-titled label produced eveningwear and daytime styles for the wholesale, ready-to-wear market, from 1961 to 1991. While he was known for his use of chiffon, Stavropoulos also created notable designs in lace, lamé, suede, and taffeta.

Stavropoulos, born in Greece, believed in classic design and found inspiration in the simplicity of ancient Greek sculpture. Renowned for his innovative draping techniques, Stavropoulos created every piece in his collection and produced the entire line in his 57th Street atelier. For each spring and fall runway presentation, Stavropoulos created about one hundred designs and held his shows at the luxurious Regency Hotel, in Manhattan. Buyers from the most important stores in New York attended each show, as well as socialites and celebrities. Stavropoulos initially became known for dressing Lady Bird Johnson during her White House years and created looks for other popular figures throughout his career.

Fiercely independent, Stavropoulos did not participate in the licensing agreements popular with other designers of his time nor did he join the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA). Stavropoulos believed in his own fashion philosophy and refused to adhere to the ephemeral nature of fashion, creating sophisticated designs that were innovative rather than shocking or avant-garde.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many people that made this thesis possible, starting with Anne Bissonnette, who introduced me to the work of George Stavropoulos and allowed me to spend two summers learning from her at the Kent State University Museum. I would also like to express much gratitude to the wonderful staff at the Kent State University Museum and Library who granted me full access to the Stavropoulos collection. Also, a huge thank you to those that agreed to be interview for this project including Dedie Coch, Dina Dellale, Yveta Graff, and most of all Peter Stavropoulos, who went above and beyond to make this thesis a complete work by sharing his memories and family photos.

I would also like to thank my faculty advisor, Dr. Virginia Gunn. I learned so much from her throughout my graduate studies and it was truly a privilege to work with her on this project. I would also like to thank faculty readers, Dr. Sandra Stansbery Buckland and Dr. Teena Jennings-Rentenaar, for their guidance and my sister, Stephanie for her active role in proofreading this work. I must also extend thanks to my parents who always encouraged me to find my own path and thanks to Chris for all his love and support throughout this process.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

While participating in an internship at the Kent State University Museum I was introduced to the work of fashion designer, George Stavropoulos (1920-1990). His career in the fashion industry spanned nearly forty years, from 1949 to 1990, and he is known for his elegant chiffon styles inspired by ancient Greek statuary. In 1991 the Museum received a sizeable donation of the designer’s work which included over 100 garments, 14 sketchbooks ranging in date from 1979 to the designer’s final collection for the spring 1991 season, and runway photography from 1968 to 1991. Recognizing the significance of the Stavropoulos donation, I decided to study Stavropoulos’s life and career using these artifacts as my sources.

My research looked in-depth at the designer’s work by studying his sketches, runway photography, and garments. The sketchbooks offer information that the designer used to translate his ideas. The pages are filled with full pencil drawings of the designs in his collections, as well as fabric swatches with the corresponding yardage amounts, and detailed sketches of the understructures used in each garment. This source is central to understanding Stavropoulos’s thought processes and offers insight into how he designed his collections.
The runway photography is equally important to knowing how Stavropoulos worked and gives an exact idea of how he wanted each design in his collection presented. These photos also illustrate the designer’s close relationship with his clients and provide evidence of the elegant atmosphere that was created at his shows. Along with the runway photography, a number of press photographs were also donated and these display Stavropoulos’s creations in professional photography settings.

While researching the runway photography accessions, I discovered that there were some inconsistencies in the page numbering of the photo albums and file folders containing the photographs. Due to these inconsistencies, I have identified the runway photography only by the accession number located on the album or file folder when identifying the source. I was unable to find accession numbers for a number of the press photographs donated. These particular photographs are located in a box which is part of the Stavropoulos collection housed in the Kent State Fashion Library, but they have not been assigned any accession numbers to date. Due to the inability to give exact accession numbers, I have attributed these photographs to the Kent State Fashion Library Archives.

The garments donated to the museum are also central to fully understanding Stavropoulos’s work. The craftsmanship built into each design is evident in the construction of his garments and the fabrics and embellishments also establish the quality of his garments. The considerable number of garments in the collection provides tangible evidence of both the designer’s day and evening looks.

In an attempt to gain further insight into Stavropoulos’s life and career, I conducted an interview with the designer’s son, Peter Stavropoulos, at his home in New York. This meeting revealed much about the designer’s personality and the relationship
with his family. I also had the opportunity to discuss the designer’s work with several of his former clients including Dedie Coch, Dina Dellale, and Yveta Graff. The participants provided information relating to where they wore Stavropoulos’s creations and why his designs appealed to them. They also shared anecdotal stories about the designer which I have included in my work to provide readers with a true sense of who Stavropoulos was.

The research conducted throughout this project aimed to construct a clear view of fashion designer George Stavropoulos. This investigation of both the professional and personal sides of his life helped reveal how he lived his life and established himself as a successful American designer.
CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY OF GEORGE STAVROPOULOS

George Stavropoulos established himself as a couture designer in Greece, his native country, long before becoming a well-known New York designer.1 Recognized for his signature chiffon dresses, Stavropoulos dressed society ladies including Maria Callas, Elizabeth Oxenburg, and Lady Bird Johnson.2 In business in the United States for nearly thirty years, Stavropoulos stayed true to his own design sense and sought to make women look soft and feminine with an understated elegance (see figure 2.1).3

Growing up in Greece

George Peter Stavropoulos was born, January 22, 1920 in Tripolis, Greece, which is located near the center of the Peloponnesian Peninsula (see figure 2.2).4 He was the seventh of ten children born to Peter Dmitri Stavropoulos and Dmitra Paraskeveopoulos.5 Interested in painting and sculpture from a young age, George quickly became known as the artistic one in the family, even creating a ball gown for one of his sisters out of an old dress worn by his grandmother.6

George’s father owned a general store in Tripolis before being the first to bring cigarette-rolling machines to the area from Germany. While the business flourished, the Greek depression and WWII brought about a changing economic status for the family.
Figure 2.1. Stavropoulos.
Photo taken by Yousuf Karsh.
Kent State Fashion Library Archives.
Figure 2.2. Greece.
Map of Greece and the Peloponnesian Peninsula. Available on the internet at:
http://www.mlahanas.de/Greece/Regions/Peloponnes.html
George’s father had a stack of German sovereign bonds, pre-WWII, that became useless after the war and Socialists nationalized the tobacco processing plant refusing to pay the family. During the Nazi occupation Dmitra even traded rubies and other precious stones, just to feed the family. Soon the children went to work to help out and George got his first job sweeping up in a tailor shop. 7

During this time, George continued to develop his craft by studying costume in books and at museums. 8 He received his first professional work as a costume designer for theatrical productions, including costumes for a production of the ballet *Giselle*. 9

**Nikis 13**

In 1949, Stavropoulos opened a small couture salon, named Nikis 13, in Athens, near Constitution Square (see figure 2.3). 10 He hired the best seamstresses and spent his time in the studio learning proper sewing techniques. “I stayed with them day and night,” he told an interviewer. He continually asked, “Explain why you do it this way and not that.” 11 When Stavropoulos opened his business, he had to learn to do everything. He believed, “You must always know how to do everything better than your workers.” 12 He also commissioned artisans to develop woven fabrics for his line and initially became successful with his coats and suits in his special cut. 13 Within three months, Stavropoulos had more orders than he could handle and quickly became the city’s leading couturier. 14

While his business in Athens grew, he often traveled to Paris to purchase fabrics, zippers, thread, and other items for his salon. 15 He made a number of contacts there and
in 1952 Christian Dior, the leading couture designer, called on him to come and work at his Paris atelier. Stavropoulos, who was fiercely independent, declined and continued
to develop his own business in Greece. He also refused to make copies of Parisian
dresses in his salon, where his evening designs, based on classic Greek silhouettes
prevailed. His clients, who included Queen Federika and the wives of wealthy Greek
shipping magnates, favored his softly draped, billowy dresses.

Nancy Angelakos

In 1957, Stavropoulos was introduced to a young woman by the name of Nancy
Angelakos, through a mutual friend Alexandra Louizos. Alessandra and Nancy were
both in Athens working for the U. S. Embassy and had been traveling together. The two
stopped by Stavropoulos’s atelier in Athens and within a week Stavropoulos and Nancy
were engaged.

Nancy grew up in Somerville, New Jersey, the daughter of immigrant parents.
Her father Vassilios, the oldest child in his family, immigrated from Greece at the age of
fourteen. He came through Ellis Island in 1899. Later he brought his brothers over to
escape the family’s poverty in Greece. When it came time for him to marry, Vassilios
returned to Greece to find his bride.

There he met and married Helen Tzovani. The name Tzovani, translated in Italian
is Giovanni. It turns out that Helen is a descendant of a black sheep from one of the
merchant prince families from Venice. The family had fleets and ports stretching all the
way from the Black Sea to Odessa. Helen was actually born in Costanza, Romania, and
moved to Greece when she was about a year old. After meeting Helen, Vassilios brought
her back to America and they settled in New Jersey, having two sons before Nancy.
While the engagement came soon in the relationship, Nancy refused to be married so quickly and she and George began dating. He invited her to have Sunday lunch with his family, a tradition in the Stavropoulos household. Nancy, who initially refused, began attending week after week. A few months into the relationship, while George was in Paris, he arranged to have each one of his brothers take Nancy out every night he was gone. When he returned they continued seeing each other and after dating for about three years Nancy finally accepted the marriage proposal.23

They were married in Greece, on October 31, 1960 (figure 2.4 and 2.5). Although the two were married in Greece, Nancy refused to stay there. According to their son Peter, the size of the Stavropoulos family was overwhelming for her and Greece in the 1950s was very different than the United States. She also knew that staying in Greece would only limit George’s career. The two honeymooned in the Greek Isles and prepared to move to the United States.24

Starting Over in New York

The move required Stavropoulos to close his successful Nikis 13 salon. By early 1961 the couple was ready to move, but before George could enter the United States, he was required to receive a complete physical. The doctor in Athens that performed the physical wanted the young couple to pay him off under the table. Nancy refused and without paying off the doctor the two left for the U. S.25

The couple brought with them some furniture, antiques, and a car that ended up being destroyed on the boat on the way over, but it was the physical that caused the most problems. It seems that by not paying off the Athenian doctor, a smudge appeared on
Figure 2.4. George and Nancy Stavropoulos. The Stavropoulos’ on their wedding day, October 31, 1960. Photo provided by Peter Stavropoulos.
Figure 2.5. George and Nancy Stavropoulos. The Stavropoulos’ on their wedding day, October 31, 1960. Photo provided by Peter Stavropoulos.
George’s chest x-ray that could have possibly looked like tuberculosis. When the two reached port, George was detained. They posted bail and within a few hours had to report to a specified hospital in the city. George ended up spending several months in the hospital because of the smudged x-ray.26

The couple moved in with Nancy’s parents in New Jersey, while George looked for work with one of the major American fashion designers.27 Unable to speak any English and unwilling to work for someone who knew less than him, Stavropoulos adhered to advice given to him by fellow Greek designer, James Galanos, and went into business for himself.28 The couple moved into New York City and George began cutting dresses on his bed.29 He bought huge pieces of cardboard, patterns, and a cutting table and began to produce pieces in their apartment.30 Stavropoulos initially sewed everything by hand.31 He then rented a small space on 57th Street and hired two seamstresses to help sew his debut American collection.32 Then on the day the twenty-five piece, day and evening wholesale collection was finished, the entire group was stolen.33 Unwilling to give up, Stavropoulos re-created each piece and in 1961 launched his first fashion show.34 His debut collection was summed up in Biography Yearbook, 1985:

Stavropoulos’s first American collection of hand finished ready-to-wear was comprised mainly of simple, short silk dresses topped by kimono-sleeved jackets sashed with wide crushed leather belts and of sophisticated evening gowns in such luxurious fabrics as crepe, brocade, silk organza and French lace.35

Charlotte Curtis of the New York Times commented that, “His designs are simple for the most part. . . . and tend toward Grecian drapery, extravagantly handsome fabrics and a kind of understated elegance.”36 She went on to say, “The clothes are American too, in
that he has analyzed the American figure and found it straighter, taller, and leaner than the Greek figure and has adapted these designs to those new proportions. “Ruth Preston of the *New York Post* also looked favorably on the collection, making reference to the classic design and modern cut of the pieces and mentioning that the dressmaker details of the décolletage and strap placement were thought out and flattering to most figures.”

Although the fashion press looked on the collection positively, it was a total failure according to department store buyers. Stavropoulos was criticized for creating a line based too much on custom details and not in line with the American buyer. He struggled for about two years, attempting to refine the silhouette of his gowns and in the meantime began designing for private clients who included socialites Mrs. Robert Love and Elizabeth Oxenburg, the former Princess of Yugoslavia.

**Bonwit’s to Bendel’s**

By 1963 Stavropoulos was prepared to try his hand at the ready-to-wear market again and this time his line took off. According to the story, Mildred Custin, the buyer for Bonwit Teller, discovered Stavropoulos and placed a substantial order for his 1963 collection. Stanley Korshak, of the famed Chicago store, and Geraldine Stutz, president of Henry Bendel, quickly followed suit.

By the debut of his 1965 collection, Stavropoulos gowns were not only carried at major fashion retailers and they could be seen in the windows along Fifth Avenue. Stavropoulos declared, “I have not changed, but the American market has. Everybody wants a custom touch and, thank God, I have it.” His 1965 collection was large and diverse. Stavropoulos used cashmere, lamb’s wool jersey, and mohair to create his
suits and coats and constructed bias-cut dresses in tweed and silk for daytime.\textsuperscript{46} These were the styles Stavropoulos was initially known for in Athens. It was, however, his floating chiffon evening dresses the Athenian women also loved that garnered him the most attention in the United States. A striking, black chiffon, column gown with velvet bodice and multi-tiered skirt stole the show, with its top layer also functioning as a wrap that could be gracefully thrown over the shoulders for added effect.\textsuperscript{47} During the mid-1960s, Stavropoulos’s client list grew to include Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Elizabeth Taylor, Maria Callas, and Shirley MacLaine.\textsuperscript{48} Stavropoulos’s success during this time also allowed him in mid-1965 to move to a larger atelier located at 16 West 57\textsuperscript{th} Street. This remained his location for the duration of his career (see figures 2.6-2.8).\textsuperscript{49}

### Designing for the White House

While the attention paid to Stavropoulos by department store buyers and his following of private clients helped his name recognition, it was a client in the White House that provided his best publicity. According to Stavropoulos, “I already had success, but a call from the White House helped.”\textsuperscript{50}

While vacationing at the Jersey shore with old friend Alexandra Louizos, Stavropoulos and his wife received a call from his assistant with the news that First Lady Claudia Alta, Lady Bird Johnson, wanted to meet with him. Stavropoulos quickly packed up and headed back to New York and met with Lady Bird at his 57\textsuperscript{th} Street atelier.\textsuperscript{51} All buying by the First Lady was done through Bonwit Teller, even though she always met with Stavropoulos at his salon. She became such a fan of Stavropoulos’s work that she
appeared in designs of his at both the opening of the new Metropolitan Opera House in Lincoln Center and the opening of the San Francisco Opera only a week apart in 1966.52

Figure 2.6. George Stavropoulos in his workroom. Stavropoulos showing garments from a 1970s collection. Photo provided by Peter Stavropoulos.
Figure 2.7. Stavropoulos’s studio.
Stavropoulos’s studio after renovation by Anne Eisenhower, 1980s.
Photo provided by Peter Stavropoulos.
Figure 2.8. Stavropoulos’s studio.
Stavropoulos’s studio after renovation by Anne Eisenhower, 1980s.
Photo provided by Peter Stavropoulos.
Stavropoulos commented in 1984, “I created her look.” The First Lady even sat for a White House portrait in one of his gowns.

The relationship between Stavropoulos and the First Lady continued for a number of years. On one occasion, Lady Bird’s schedule would not allow her to make the trip to New York for a fitting and she asked Stavropoulos to travel to the White House with her dresses and perform the fitting there. Stavropoulos agreed and brought her dresses home with him that night after work, packed a suitcase, and got on the Metroliner to Washington D.C. He stayed across the street from the White House at the Hay-Adams and in the morning put on a suit, threw the dresses over his shoulder, and crossed the street. He walked up to the Marine Guard and told him that he had an appointment with Mrs. Johnson. As the story goes, the Marine Guard quickly dismissed him and asked that he move along. Stavropoulos, with his thick Greek accent, explained to the Guard that the dresses were for a fitting and to please call Bess Able, the First Lady’s social secretary. Eventually, the Guard called up to the White House, but was unable to pronounce the name of the man at the gate. Ms. Able assured the Guard that the man with the dresses was Mr. Stavropoulos and he was here for a fitting with the First Lady. With that, Stavropoulos set out across the White House lawn, dresses in hand. This type of unusual arrival became customary whenever Stavropoulos visited the White House for a fitting (see figure 2.9).

Growth of the Business

Throughout the 1960s Stavropoulos’s business continued to grow and his chiffon creations still garnered the most excitement from the fashion press. In his 1966 spring
Figure 2.9. Stavropoulos with President Johnson and Lady Bird. Stavropoulos meeting the President while at the White House, 1960s. Photo provided by Peter Stavropoulos.
collection, Stavropoulos blended chiffon with lace and other fabrics, while crystal pleating added dimension to gowns. These looks were offset by shimmering floral pattern dresses. According to Stavropoulos, however, the most stunning piece from the collection came in the form of black Spanish lace outlined with silver embroidery atop a simple black chiffon dress. His collection from fall 1966 included chiffon panels over floor-length lamé and two-toned blends of chiffon incorporating colors such as blue over yellow, turquoise over emerald, and red over coral. By 1967 Stavropoulos began to experiment with chiffon in geometric and abstract patterns and added ombré shades to his dresses.  

While Stavropoulos experimented with some additions to his line in the 1960s, he stayed true to his own design sense and did not participate in the mini trend or hemline controversies of the time, keeping his hems just above the knee. Stavropoulos did raise hemlines on his tunics in 1967. Always influenced by his Greek heritage, Stavropoulos explained that the short looks were based on the traditional tunics worn by Evzone Guards of the Greek army and were meant “for playtime or staying at home at night.” Other noteworthy designs from the 1960s include the “Calytra wrap,” which was a snug fitting jacket on one side and cape on the other with a detachable stole that could also be wrapped around the wearer’s head (see figure 2.10). Stavropoulos produced this style in pink satin for evening and navy or beige wool for daytime. He also introduced trousers in his 1968 collection, which were based on a pattern that required no seaming construction. In 1969 Stavropoulos introduced what he referred to as “goddess pants,” a loose fitting, lightweight chiffon pant (see figure 2.11).
Figure 2.10. Calyptra wrap.  
Calyptra wrap design with hood, 1960s.  
Kent State Fashion Library Archives.
Figure 2.11. Goddess pants.
Stavropoulos goddess pant design, fall 1969.
The soft flowing line and feminine look of styles popular during the 1970s aligned easily with Stavropoulos’s design aesthetic and his business continued to flourish. In 1974, Stavropoulos emphasized his chiffon creations by accenting them with capelets, scarves, and panels that could be wrapped or float effortlessly about the wearer. He also accessorized this collection with billowing sleeves and paired chiffon with satin, lace, and embroidered ribbons.

By 1975, Stavropoulos added pointed handkerchief hems and played down embellishments, letting the natural Grecian simplicity of his styles show through (see figure 2.12). His daytime styles shifted between loose coats and narrow wrapped styles, but it was his chiffon evening wear that had become his signature by this time. In 1975, The New York Times fashion writer, Bernadine Morris wrote, “After he knocks himself out making clothes for women to wear during the day, invariably the evening things set people oohing and aahing.”

In his 1978 collection, Stavropoulos played with vibrant colors of flame red and jewel tones in shades of teal and red (see figures 2.13 and 2.14). He also used gold lamé, a typical fabric for the designer, in slinky cuts that accented the legs and embellished some looks with feathers and beads. The lively expression of this collection forced one fashion writer to make the comment, [the looks are] “Not exactly recommended for the discotheques, but ravishing in a palace. . . .[and] are always regal.” Stavropoulos also accented the décolletage with square, strapless, and one-shoulder necklines. During this time Stavropoulos’s client list included Queen Anne-Marie, the former queen of Greece, as well as socialites, Jan Chipman and Sophie Gimbel.
Figure 2.12. Handkerchief hem.
Stavropoulos handkerchief hem design, fall 1975.
Figure 2.13. Teal jewel-tone chiffon.
Brightly colored chiffon used by Stavropoulos, spring 1977.
Figure 2.14. Red jewel-tone chiffon.
Brightly colored chiffon used by Stavropoulos, spring 1977.
By the 1980s Stavropoulos’s popularity had grown and stores such as Martha’s, Neiman-Marcus, and Evelyn Byrnes were carrying his creations across the country.\textsuperscript{71} Stella Blum, the curator of costumes at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, assessed his 1982 collection as “his best collection ever.”\textsuperscript{72} The collection included his signature chiffon dresses and new details such as beaded embroidery, metallic threads, and a range of colors from royal blue chiffon to purple taffeta and one narrow column dress in brown chiffon.\textsuperscript{73} Stavropoulos also celebrated his twentieth year in business in the U. S. in 1982. He decided not to celebrate it with any fanfare, stating, “I am a simple man. . . . I don’t like to make a fuss.” After the show he simply went to dinner at La Genouille with his wife and members of his workroom.\textsuperscript{74}

In the mid-1980s Stavropoulos also began appealing to a younger clientele. Pamela Cafritz, Jan Chipman’s niece, and Amelia Prounis, daughter of Lila Prounis, were both in attendance at Stavropoulos’s fall 1985 runway show.\textsuperscript{75} The changing dynamic of his customer was reflected in some of the more playful silhouettes seen during the mid-1980s. Stavropoulos stated in an interview in 1987, “I have more younger customers. They asked for short evening dresses and suits.”\textsuperscript{76} His 1987 collection reflected their desires. Hems grew shorter, the shortest seen in his collection since the 1960s, and dresses got trendier when Stavropoulos experimented with embroidery, suede, silk jersey, and velvet for his line.\textsuperscript{77}

After a break from runway shows that lasted three seasons, Stavropoulos was back in 1989 with a new runway collection which included an array of layered chiffon dresses in different colors to produce iridescent effects, along with a number of brocade and taffeta looks.\textsuperscript{78} The collection was Stavropoulos in his classic mode, creating
fashions that made women look soft and feminine, with an understated elegance (see figures 2.15 and 2.16).

In business for nearly thirty years in the United States, Stavropoulos remained in charge of his business until shortly before his death from lung cancer in 1990 and the company officially closed in January 1991.79 Without Stavropoulos, the line could not continue. Many from the fashion industry expressed their sadness at the loss of a gifted and talented colleague.80

**Family**

Stavropoulos’s family remained the central part of his world throughout his life. While his family in Greece never moved to the United States, Stavropoulos maintained a close relationship with them and often traveled back to Greece to visit.81

As for his new family in the United States, Stavropoulos and his wife Nancy had a phenomenally close relationship and complemented each other in every way.82 While Nancy functioned as the analytical one in the relationship, George had the freedom to be the life of the party. Their son recalls how interesting it was to see them work a party, “They would walk in, they would split up, and my mother . . . would go talk to the men and my dad would talk to the women.”83 When not out, the two often spent quiet evenings together, George drawing while Nancy completed the *Times* crossword puzzles.84 In 1965 George told a reporter that, “I don’t need to go out to be happy, I don’t have time and besides I’d rather go home to my wife.”85 A sentimental man, Stavroupoulos also commented to a *New York Times* reporter in 1988 that he still had the
Figure 2.15. Stavropoulos sketch.
A classic Stavropoulos design, fall 1989.
Figure 2.16. Stavropoulos sketch.
A classic Stavropoulos design, fall 1989.
twenty-eight-year-old black alpaca suit he wore to his wedding in Greece: “I keep it because to me that was a beautiful day and a day that changed my life.”

Nancy, a beautiful and stylish woman before she met Stavroupoulos, became the epitome of chic when he began designing for her. He often designed suits for her, one of which was noticed by a reporter in 1961, before Stavropoulos’s collection had grown to include such daytime looks. The reporter noted, “Although his first American collection has no suits and coats, his wife’s own fall clothes prove that he can design and make them.”

In 1965 the couple celebrated the birth of their son, Peter. Attending his first fashion show at 5 months old, Peter grew up around his father’s business (see figures 2.17 and 2.18). Stavropoulos taught his son to cut, drape, and sew at a young age. Peter also fondly remembers his father creating a magnificent costume out of silver lamé for him when he was cast as the Tin Man in a production of The Wizard of Oz in third grade. Peter also recalls from his childhood, his father sewing “Stavropoulos” labels on the inside of his clothes to identify them.

As a teenager Peter became the unofficial photographer for his father’s runway shows and would sometimes handle the music for the show. He and his father were extremely close. While home from college during Easter break one year, he and a college buddy attempted to persuade his father to go out with them for the night. The trio was on their way to a restaurant, following midnight mass, to meet Nancy and a number of family friends when Peter teased his father about being “over the hill.” Always up for a challenge, Stavropoulos decided to prove his son wrong. The three had a wonderful dinner complete with Greek music, resulting in Stavropoulos getting up and dancing on
Figure 2.17. Stavropoulos with Peter and model.
George and Peter Stavropoulos before a fashion show, early 1970s.
Figure 2.18. Stavropoulos and Peter.
George and Peter at Stavropoulos’s studio, 1970.
Photo provided by Peter Stavropoulos.
the table. When the night was over Stavropoulos simply looked at his son and said, “Over the hill, huh?”

In the 1980s Stavropoulos was affiliated with the International Debutante Ball, and he also involved his son Peter in the organization. Stavropoulos would always donate a dress to the auction and his son Peter would work as an escort at the Ball. In the mid-1980s, shortly after his father had suffered a heart attack, Peter was preparing for the Ball, when he realized he would have to travel to New York Presbyterian Hospital to continue a tradition between the two. When Peter arrived at his father’s hospital room, in tails, carrying his tie, Stavropoulos knew just what he was there for. He sat up, swung his legs over his bed, tied the tie and dismissed his son saying, “Okay, you can go.” Stavropoulos, a proud man with a cunning sense of humor, was obviously glad to see his son that night and enjoyed the idea that he still needed his father.

**Design Philosophy**

Over his thirty year career in the United States, Stavropoulos produced ready-to-wear collections at the caliber of Parisian haute couture and kept his own ideas on fashion at the center of his designs. Stavropoulos spoke of his design philosophy in a 1983 interview: “My dresses are sexy without being vulgar. Without showing anything they show everything. Every man wants to see a woman dressed like that, and . . . that is the secret to my success.”

Stavropoulos also recognized a vital piece of advice given to him in 1950 by Coco Chanel. She said, “Listen to me you little Greek. A woman has to live in her clothes. I’m a little girl but I like my lovers to be tall. When I want to stretch up to hug him, if
your dress pulls me down, then the hell with your dress!” Stavropoulos took this idea and developed it into all of his designs. He later told an interviewer, “I don’t want clothes to be tight. It’s not high fashion. A woman must be able to move around in a dress.” His Grecian-inspired eveningwear became the embodiment of this idea and the foundation of his fashion empire.

Stavropoulos became most well known for his looks inspired by classical Greek sculpture. His floor-length chiffon evening gowns utilized multi-layered, free-floating chiffon panels that gracefully floated about the wearer achieving both simplicity in form and timeless elegance. It was important to Stavropoulos that his designs be as fluid as possible. He commented, “The dress has to follow her skin, help her to be herself. If you don’t feel comfortable, you don’t look beautiful.” New York Times fashion writer Bernadine Morris commented on Stavropoulos’s design philosophy in 1974 saying, “Never mind about hemlines and other trendy matters. George Stavropoulos concentrates on clothes, especially evening clothes, of everlasting allure. His clothes have a classic quality that avoids the vagaries of fashion--the dress bought ten years ago can still be flattering today.”

Stavropoulos was a very logical man when it came to his business. He kept regular hours and wore a suit to work everyday. His son Peter recalled from his childhood his father’s routine:

I grew up in this building (69th Street on the upper East side). I used to go to school between Park and Madison. So we would wake up, have breakfast, and he would walk me to school. . . . (then) he’d walk to the office on 57th between 5th and 6th and he would stay at the office until about 6 or 6:30. He would close up and walk home.
Keeping regular hours at the office and having a lack of the eccentricity surrounding other designers most likely played a role in Stavropoulos’s lengthy and well-established career.

Stavropoulos produced two seasons each year, a fall and a spring. The collections often began at home with Stavropoulos drawing in his library listening to his favorite opera.\textsuperscript{102} His drawings were small, quick sketches made on his note-card sized Hermès agenda and were later worked out at his 57th Street atelier (see figure 2.19).\textsuperscript{103} Stavropoulos preferred to work on a size 8 dress form and draped his designs directly in his chosen fabric, rather than the industry standard muslin.\textsuperscript{104} His designs could include up to twenty-four yards of chiffon and ranged in price from $2,000 to $7,000.\textsuperscript{105}

Typically producing one hundred pieces for each collection, every design was handled directly by Stavropoulos.\textsuperscript{106} He commented in an interview with Connoisseur magazine that, “People find it hard to believe that I cut and drape every dress in my collection from these little sketches. Most designers don’t know how to do it.”\textsuperscript{107} In fact, Stavropoulos only employed his cutter, Nicky Angelo, to create patterns so that multiple sizes of his designs could be created and each garment was entirely produced in Stavropoulos’s 57th Street atelier.\textsuperscript{108}

When it came time to show his collections, Stavropoulos maintained the same level of control over these events. The Regency Hotel on the Upper East Side was the chosen location for Stavropoulos shows. This location was used for its convenience between home and Stavropoulos’s atelier. The show was often a low-key affair by today’s standards, but always incorporated a luxurious atmosphere and was truly centered around the clothes (see figure 2.20). Stavropoulos’s wife Nancy offered guests
Figure 2.19. Stavropoulos sketch.
A page from Stavropoulos’s sketchbook with small sketches used to work out design details, spring 1979.
Figure 2.20. Stavropoulos runway show.
A shot from a Stavropoulos fashion show at the Regency Hotel, New York City, fall 1968.
champagne and there was usually a Greek band playing (see figure 2.21). Stavropoulos always met his guests after the show and was quite accessible to his clients (see figure 2.22).\textsuperscript{109}

Stavropoulos’s design philosophy not only encompassed his views on fashion but was also deeply rooted in his charismatic personality and fierce independence. Over his thirty year career in the United States, Stavropoulos’s designs were copied many times. Having his debut American collection high jacked frustrated Stavropoulos but the realization that nothing could be done to keep wholesalers and other designers from cashing in on his ideas infuriated him. After his 1965 collection was copied, Stavropoulos devised innovative ways of working with chiffon and as late in his career as 1988, Stavropoulos was still attempting to make his designs stand out. He ripped a number of silk flower appliqués off dresses just before a show because, according to him, “Everybody else is using them.”\textsuperscript{110}

Stavropoulos had many friends within the fashion industry including Pauline Trigère, James Galanos, and Judith Leiber. Stavropoulos’s son recalls running his father’s dresses over to Judith Leiber’s atelier and returning with purses for his mother, in a sort of trade. Although Stavropoulos had quite a few close friends in the industry, his individualistic nature also kept him from joining organizations like the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA). Even with friends Trigère and Scassi as founding members and Galanos and Leiber joining as lifelong members, Stavropoulos found the idea of the group too constricting, for a number of reasons. Stavropoulos never unionized his company, which many of the CFDA members did. He believed that the size of his company did not require unionized workers. Having had pieces in his
Figure 2.21. Greek band.
Greek band at the Stavropoulos runway show, spring 1984.
Figure 2.22. Runway show.
Stavropoulos entering at the completion of a runway show, fall 1981.
collection copied by other designers that were members, made this an organization
Stavropoulos was not interested in being a part of.\textsuperscript{111}

Stavropoulos’s individualistic personality also led him to decide not to participate
in the licensing deals that became such an integral part of the business during his career.
Approached to do both a perfume and a name licensing deal for lower priced ready-to-
wear, the deals fell through when it came time to sign the contracts (see figure 2.23).
Since the prepared contracts made Stavropoulos assume personal liability or relinquish
artistic license, Stavropoulos decided to tear up the contracts and continue with work on
his main collection. Stavropoulos never hired a publicist or did much in the way of press
for his collections, relying on his own vibrant personality and word of mouth, from his
faithful clients, to sell his collections.\textsuperscript{112}

He also refused to give dresses away, a practice that many designers participate in
to gain exposure. Having designed many dresses for the Tony Awards, Stavropoulos was
approached by Alvin Cole to provide a number of dresses for the Tony’s, free of charge,
for the exposure. Stavropoulos, true to form, felt he did not need the exposure and
declined to do the dress without payment. He rarely loaned things and simply did not
approve of the practice of giving things away.\textsuperscript{113}

Stavropoulos won a number of awards throughout his career including the REX
Award three times and was incredibly artistic.\textsuperscript{114} Stavropoulos painted throughout his
life and according to his son Peter “was blessed with talent. My dad took a few (piano)
lessons and he would sit down and start playing simple stuff . . . and it sounded like
music . . . not just someone hitting notes” (see figure 2.24 and 25).\textsuperscript{115} Always able to
find the beauty in everything, Stavropoulos was also an avid antique collector. His collection

![Figure 2.23. Fragrance bottles. Bottles created for Stavropoulos fragrance. Photo provided by Peter Stavropoulos.](image-url)
Figure 2.24. A painting by Stavropoulos. Stavropoulos’s portrait of his wife, Nancy. Photo provided by Peter Stavropoulos.
Figure 2.25. A painting by Stavropoulos. Stavropoulos’s Byzantine style painting. Photo provided by Peter Stavropoulos.
included such serendipitous finds as Chinese silk panels, discovered in the basement of a San Francisco antique shop and a clay carafe, accidentally recovered by a fisherman in the Greek isles (see figure 2.26 and 2.27).\textsuperscript{116} Stavropoulos also had a number of pieces of Byzantine art, a kilim woven in Romania for his wife’s mother when she was born, and clay bowls dating all the way back to B.C.\textsuperscript{117}

Stavropoulos could see the beauty in everything and he could also be inspired by anything. While at a pizza shop with his son in New Jersey, Stavropoulos illustrated this concept, “A guy and a girl came in wearing overalls. I told Peter I could make a beautiful gown from overalls. I changed the pants to a skirt, but the idea came from the overalls.”\textsuperscript{118} Peter commented on the success of the overall-inspired design: “(It) lasted about four or five seasons. We’d tweak it here, we’d tweak it there, but it was fundamentally based on the overalls.”\textsuperscript{119}

**Philanthropy**

Stavropoulos always believed in philanthropy and supported a number of causes throughout his career. He often donated his dresses to charitable auctions, such as one sponsored by the Women’s Committee of the Washington Opera, and he was on the guest list of some of the most fashionable benefits including the Spanish Gala held for the benefit of the Spanish Institute.\textsuperscript{120} Stavropoulos also put on a number of fashion shows to benefit causes including The Rockette Alumnae Foundation, and The Combined Cardiac Research Fund of the University of Chicago.\textsuperscript{121}

Stavropoulos’s philanthropic efforts also included causes very close to his heart. He was an avid supporter of the New York City Opera and his wife Nancy was a member
Figure 2.26. A textile wall hanging in Stavropoulos’s dining room. Late 18th century Japanese marriage-bed cover, hand painted family crest and symbols of good fortune. Photographed by Peter Vitale for *Architectural Digest*, September 1989.
Figure 2.27. A textile wall hanging in Stavropoulos’s living room. Chinese silk panels - embroidered with apocalyptic scenes. Photographed by Peter Vitale for *Architectural Digest*, September 1989.
of the New York City Opera Guild. Stavropoulos also supported causes affecting his home country, which included helping earthquake victims in Greece. Stavropoulos was also a devoted supporter of St. Michael’s Home for the Aged in Yonkers, New York, where his mother-in-law spent time after developing cerebral atherosclerosis. Stavropoulos firmly believed in charity and helped many worth while causes, throughout his life (see figure 2.28).

Conclusion

Stavropoulos was a dynamic individual who developed his craft and found ways to make everything he did unique. He continually challenged himself, stating:

When I do something wrong, I am the only one hurt; and I know that for my business to stay a success tomorrow I have to do something better. I compete only with myself every season. No one has to speak for me. Years ago when I was still struggling, I told my assistant, Dorothy, “I’m the best.” I knew I couldn’t depend on anyone else to say it for me then. Two years later people were saying, “You know, I heard that Stavropoulos is the best.” Of course, they don’t remember who said it!

His charismatic personality won him friends and life-long clients that respected his vision. Stavropoulos is remembered for his ethereal chiffon creations and his ability to see the beauty in everything. He cared deeply for his family and moved halfway around the world for the love of his wife. He was a confident man who maintained a successful business for thirty years in the United States and he established himself among the elite American designers that place craftsmanship and elegance as priorities. In the end, it was Stavropoulos’s individualist nature and vibrant character that made him a true original.
Figure 2.28. George and Nancy Stavropoulos. The Stavropoulos’s dancing at a charity benefit. Photo provided by Peter Stavropoulos.
Notes

1 Taryn Benbow-Pfalzgraf and others, Contemporary Fashion (Detroit: St. James Press/Gale Group/Thomson Learning, 2002), 624.


4 Moritz, 400.

5 Ibid.


7 Peter Stavropoulos, interview by author, New York, NY, 1 November 2007.

8 Moritz, 401.

9 Ibid.


11 Moritz, 401.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.


17 Ibid.

Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Moritz, 401.

Ibid.

Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.

Ibid.

Moritz, 401.

Ibid.

Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.

Moritz, 401.

Ibid.

Curtis, “Greek Designer Adapts Drape for U. S. Figures.”

Ibid.

Moritz, 401.

Ibid.

Bender, “Stavropoulos: A Greek Name to Drop.”
41 Ibid.

42 Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.

43 Bender, “Stavropoulos: A Greek Name to Drop.”

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Mortiz, 402.

48 Ibid.

49 Bender, “Stavropoulos: A Greek Name to Drop.”

50 Hawkins, “Chiffon Plus Simplicity Equals Elegance.”

51 Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.

52 Hawkins, “Chiffon Plus Simplicity Equals Elegance.”

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.

56 Moritz, 402.


58 Moritz, 402.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Rennolds-Milbank, 261.

Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid.


80 Ibid.

81 Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 Bender, “Stavropoulos: A Greek Name to Drop.”


87 Curtis, “Greek Designer Adapts Drape for U. S. Figures.”


89 Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid.


94 Pendola, 16.

95 Ibid.

96 Curtis, “Greek Designer Adapts Drape for U. S. Figures.”

97 Moritz, 400.

98 Pendola, 16.

Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Rennolds-Milbank, 158.

Ibid., 236.

Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.

Pendola, 16.

Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.

Ibid.


Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid. And Rennolds-Milbank, 236.


Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.


122 Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.

123 Ibid.

124 Pendola, 16.
CHAPTER III

THE WORK OF GEORGE STAVROPOULOS

George Stavropoulos’s career as a fashion designer spanned nearly thirty years in the United States. His designs are classic and many were based on the statuesque simplicity of ancient Greek sculpture.1 Highly regarded for his use of chiffon, Stavropoulos made a name for himself in eveningwear, while also producing suits and coats in his signature cut.2 The Stavropoulos label, highly associated with luxury and craftsmanship, signified couture-caliber, ready-to-wear that featured custom details and intricate styling.3

The Development of the Stavropoulos Style

George Stavropoulos began designing in Athens, Greece, under his self started Nikis 13 label, in the late 1940s.4 He learned and perfected his craft while creating both day and evening looks for wealthy Athenian women.5 His overall style took shape during these years. In 1965 Stavropoulos commented to fashion writer, Marilyn Bender, about his early designs, “I was unique (in Athens). I never copied Paris.”6 Offering distinctively different designs at his salon, Stavropoulos chose early on not to adhere to the ephemeral nature of fashion.
Initially becoming known for his well-crafted suits and coats in what he referred to as his “special cut,” Stavropoulos paid close attention to the details he built into each piece, developing weightless linings and understructures for his daytime designs.7 Stavropoulos spoke to Charlotte Curtis of The New York Times in 1961 on this subject: “Clothes must be finished inside. . . . If they are not neat, it would be the end of my business in Greece.” He went on to say, “The clothes are corseted and boned inside to make them fit properly. . . . This inner construction makes them look the way I want them to.”8 Stavropoulos also favored intricately woven fabrics for his suits and even commissioned artisans to weave woolens for his custom business.9

Throughout the 1950s Stavropoulos also refined his draping skills and began creating designs inspired by classical Greek figures. He achieved this look by cutting dresses similar to Grecian togas, with one-shoulder necklines and asymmetrical folds that fell to the floor (see figure 3.1).10 Other creations fastened at the shoulder and resembled traditional Greek chitons (see figure 3.2).11 Stavropoulos constructed these looks of lightweight chiffon fabric and developed innovative draping techniques that gently followed the natural curves of a woman’s body.12 In Greece, Stavropoulos’s figure-flattering looks became even more popular than his daytime styles and these ethereal creations were signatures of the Stavropoulos label.13

After moving to the United States in 1961, Stavropoulos based his debut American collection on the draped, Grecian silhouette he had perfected in Athens.14 American women reacted similarly to the Athenian women and flocked to Stavropoulos for his elegant, statuesque styles.15 He later added daytime looks and outerwear to his
Figure 3.2. Stavropoulos Greek chiton design. Stavropoulos press photograph, 1968. Kent State Fashion Library Archives.
American collections and established himself among the country’s elite fashion designers. Stavropoulos’s style lies in his uncluttered, sophisticated looks that let the wearer shine through. He commented to Connoisseur Magazine in June 1983 that “The dress is the frame, not the picture. You should see the woman first, not the dress.” He went on to explain, “My dresses are sexy without being vulgar. Without showing anything they show everything. Every man wants to see a woman dressed like that, and that’s the truth. That is the secret to my success.”

The ease and overall gracefulness present in Stavropoulos designs was not by accident. Stavropoulos stated in 1984, “The hardest thing to achieve is simplicity and elegance.” He sought to make women look beautiful and his designs reflect his basic philosophy that, “classic design is forever.” While Stavropoulos’s style remained fairly consistent throughout his career, he challenged himself to invent modern variations of his classic looks and these styles carried him through nearly four decades in the fashion industry.

The Business of Designing

Stavropoulos, a dedicated and methodic designer, approached each collection in a similar manner. Often starting with a number of small sketches, Stavropoulos typically focused on his Greek heritage for inspiration. While he did not concentrate on a direct theme for each collection, he did take into account the basic mood of each season and always considered what women wanted to wear. Whether that meant being aware of an upcoming event many of his clients would be attending, such as the Metropolitan Opera’s
centennial celebration in 1983, or considering the evolutionary changes in fashion to hemline and silhouette, Stavropoulos always incorporated contemporary touches in his designs. 

Once Stavropoulos decided what characteristics to include for a particular season, he then worked out each design by draping it on a dressmaker’s form in his 57th Street atelier. Each piece was handled directly by Stavropoulos, who maintained that he had “complete control” over every design produced under his label. Stavropoulos rarely worked in muslin, a rigid practice that does not lend itself to creating the free floating type of designs he was known for. Once the designing phase was complete, Stavropoulos decided how many pieces of each design would be created. Typically, anywhere from three to fifty copies would be made, entirely in-house, and then shipped to stores such as Martha, Bergdorf-Goodman, Elizabeth Arden, and Neiman Marcus.

Stavropoulos’s collections were usually large and varied, including on average about one hundred designs. Draped chiffon styles were always a focus in his collections, as well as daytime looks, which included casual pieces such as suits, dresses, and coats. Stavropoulos also paid particular attention to the embellishments and textiles he used in his collections, selecting only the most luxurious. While Stavropoulos maintained a certain level of consistency in his designs, in the mid-1980s, as an attempt to appeal to some of his new, younger clients, he did introduce a number of uncharacteristically trendy styles.

**Chiffon Styles**

Chiffon is the fabric most associated with George Stavropoulos and he worked with the fabric extensively throughout his career. In fashion circles, Stavropoulos was
known as the master of the chiffon dress. Fellow designer Jerry Silverman commented to 
one who could handle chiffon the way he does is Jean Dessés,” referring to the French 
couture designer whose collections were popular in the 1950s.31

Stavropoulos most vividly pulled from his Greek heritage for inspiration when 
designing his chiffon styles. He found chiffon an ideal medium for draping dresses 
which could embody a certain movement or fluidity, reminiscent of the effortless drapery 
found in Greek statuary. Lynn Manulis of Martha, the Park Avenue dress shop, stated, 
“When he is keyed into his roots, his evening dresses are better than anyone else’s.”32 
Stavropoulos’s sensitivity to the simplicity seen in Grecian styles allowed him to tap into 
a classic and timeless silhouette that could be continuously reinvented and manipulated 
into new forms.

Stavropoulos’s chiffon looks are also marked by their undeniably feminine feel. 
He commented on his use of chiffon to *The L.A. Times* in 1984, “I’ve favored chiffon for 
many years. It’s the most feminine of fabrics--very ethereal, fragile--yet extremely 
strong, just like a woman.”33 With his Greek heritage as constant inspiration, 
Stavropoulos created styles which exuded a type femininity reminiscent of Venus de 
Milo. In 1983, Stavropoulos spoke to Joyce Pendola, on the femininity seen in his 
collections: “My clothes are for the woman who is a woman. She is not a child. She is 
not a boy. Women want to look frail and fragile. If they are not, my clothes will create 
the illusion that they are.”34 The femininity and understated elegance achieved by 
Stavropoulos in his chiffon designs only further distinguished his styles from other 
American designers. In an interview with *Connoisseur Magazine*, Stavropoulos
described his early encounters with the American mentality, “Everybody told me I’d never have success here because American women would not wear clothes that were too feminine. But I was not discouraged. There is no such thing as too feminine.” In the end, Stavropoulos’s ultra-feminine philosophy catapulted his designs into an atmosphere of regal, elegance unaffected by current fashion vicissitudes.

The silhouette of Stavropoulos’s chiff on gowns, typically a long, narrow column, gently followed the wearer’s curves without hugging the body tightly (see figure 3.3). Bernadine Morris, fashion writer for The New York Times, asserted that his looks were “designed to enhance the body and move gracefully.” His chiffon styles were known for their generous cut and the excess ease enabled his designs to be worn innumerable ways. In 1965, Stavropoulos spoke to fashion writer Charlotte Curtis, describing the freedom of movement built into his designs: “I don’t want clothes to be tight. It’s not high fashion. A woman must be able to move around in a dress.” Stavropoulos also took great care in making his chiffon styles look flawless and stated that his gowns looked as if “they haven’t been touched by a needle.” He also developed draping and cutting techniques that utilized minimal seaming, and he could create a design from a single piece of fabric.

Over the years Stavropoulos’s techniques for working with chiffon evolved and particular characteristics became signature of his designs. Most notably his styles had a type of free floating, effortless movement that created a flurry of constant motion around the wearer. Stavropoulos achieved this visual commotion with a combination of lightweight fabric and unattached chiffon panels that joined the garment only at the
Figure 3.3. Stavropoulos column silhouette.
Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1968.
neckline or waist seams (see figure 3.4). Stavropoulos also had a particular talent for
layering his chiffon looks in a practice that made them sheer, but at the same time opaque
where they needed to be, without the need for a separate underslip.\textsuperscript{41} He sometimes used
up to twenty-four yards of fabric for a single design.\textsuperscript{42}

Stavropoulos’s free floating looks were also characterized by the way the designer
draped the sleeves of his chiffon garments. He designed some sleeves to appear like
angel wings on the wearer (see figure 3.5). At rest, the excess fabric draped easily at the
wearer’s side and with the arms outstretched the chiffon fell gracefully from the wrist to
the hem. Stavropoulos also designed an asymmetrical version of the angel wing style
similar to his “Calyptra wrap” design from the 1960s.\textsuperscript{43} This style incorporated a snug-
fitting sleeve on one side and a side-swept cape on the other (see figure 3.6).\textsuperscript{44}
Stavropoulos also favored wide billowy sleeves, that could either be left loose at the wrist
or caught poetically into soft gathers at the cuff (see figures 3.7 and 3.8).\textsuperscript{45}

In similar fashion to his sleeve designs, Stavropoulos also paid particular attention to the
hem of his chiffon looks. Many of his shorter cocktail styles, and some of his mid-calf
length designs, utilized a handkerchief hem. This type of hem is noted for its irregular
pointed edges and multi-layered look (see figure 3.9). Stavropoulos used this hem, to
once again, play off the chiffon’s weightless nature, allowing the layers to float
boundlessly about the wearer. In opposition to this style, Stavropoulos gathered the hem
on several of his designs. This unique hem style resulted in the creation of an interesting
sack-like appearance that encased the body from the empire to the ankle (see figure 3.10).
Stavropoulos also developed a hem which involved variation in length. This high-low
version sat above the knee in the front and dropped to floor length in the back. The effect
Figure 3.4. Stavropoulos free floating design.
Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1969.
Figure 3.5. Stavropoulos angel wing design.  
Kent State Fashion Library Archives.
Figure 3.7. Stavropoulos design with billowy sleeve. 
Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1976. 
Figure 3.9. Stavropoulos handkerchief hem.  
Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1987.  
created by this hem was quite dramatic and allowed the back of the garment to glide gracefully through the air (see figure 3.11).

In another type of design innovation, Stavropoulos created pant styles based on his flowing, draped silhouette (see figure 3.12). These looks were significant because they were entirely constructed of chiffon, a fabric typically only associated with evening wear and more delicate creations. Stavropoulos, however draped these looks with the same simplicity and graceful elegance found in his evening gowns and was able to meld the two styles effortlessly.

Stavropoulos’s chiffon looks were also known for their illustrious color combinations. He often combined layers of chiffon in brightly colored contrasts or variation of values to achieve iridescent effects (see figures 3.13 to 3.16). Due to the fact that chiffon, by nature, is a light admitting, porous fabric, Stavropoulos’s layering system allowed the under layers to be subtly seen through the top layers, resulting in eye-catching combinations. For this reason, the blending of color was vitally important to the overall design in these looks and Stavropoulos had a way of filtering the chiffon and hues with enormously successful, visually pleasing results.

In another form of layering, Stavropoulos usually included a shawl, wrap, capelet, or panel with his chiffon gowns. These additional pieces were almost always made of chiffon and could be wrapped snugly around the wearer’s shoulders or belted at the waist of one of his free floating designs (see figures 3.17 and 3.18). Stavropoulos also showed these pieces on the runway as scarves draped around the neck and occasionally even designed a fitted capelet to be worn with certain styles (see figures 3.19 and 3.20).
Figure 3.11. Stavropoulos high-low hem style.
Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1969.
Figure 3.14. Stavropoulos layered chiffon with value variation. Stavropoulos chiffon dress design. Kent State University Museum 1991.004.0005. Photo by author.
Figure 3.15. Stavropoulos layered chiffon in contrasting colors. Stavropoulos chiffon dress design, fall 1981. Kent State University Museum 1991.004.0002. Photo by author.
Figure 3.16. Stavropoulos contrasting layered style on the runway.
Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1981.
Figure 3.18. Stavropoulos chiffon panel worn as belt. Stavropoulos runway show, spring 1983. Kent State Fashion Library Archives 1991.004.0156.
Figure 3.19. Stavropoulos chiffon scarf.  
Stavropoulos runway show, spring 1985.  
Figure 3.20. Stavropoulos capelet.
Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1987.
These convertible pieces were a staple in Stavropoulos collections and could be used to alter the way his chiffon looks were presented.

Stavropoulos is most celebrated for his artful draping and innovative use of chiffon. His designs are marked by a number of unique qualities that differentiate them from the rest. His chiffon styles formed the basis of his fashion philosophy, making up about one third of each of his collections. Stavropoulos’s chiffon styles were the foundation of his business and synonymous with the Stavropoulos name.

Evening Styles

Even though Stavropoulos worked considerably with chiffon throughout his career, he was also adept at working with other fabrics for his evening looks. Designing in his classic form, Stavropoulos crafted ultra-feminine evening dresses in fabrics such as brocade, lace, satin, and taffeta (see figures 3.21 and 3.22). These looks often embodied Stavropoulos’s signature draping styles and Grecian inspiration (see figure 3.23). He also attempted to achieve new silhouettes and was quite successful working with these fabrics on the bias (see figure 3.24). Lynn Manulis, of Martha, commented to The New York Times in 1985, “He handles the bias cut so well. . . . He is one of the few designers today who understands how to make clothes that way.”

These evening styles, that departed from his renowned chiffon designs, gave him a place to expand and experiment with his silhouettes. They offered his clients alternatives to his chiffon designs without abandoning his basic philosophy. In an interview with Timothy Hawkins in 1983, Stavropoulos stated that he handled “delicate luxurious fabric with discernment and simplicity.” This statement rings true for both
Figure 3.21. Stavropoulos with models in eveningwear. Models wearing two of Stavropoulos’s evening designs, 1964. Kent State Fashion Library Archives.
Figure 3.22. Stavropoulos taffeta evening design. Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1981. Kent State Fashion Library Archives 1991.004.0155.
Figure 3.24. Stavropoulos lace and satin evening design.  
Stavropoulos runway show, 1990.  
his designs created in chiffon, and for the looks Stavropoulos designed using any other sumptuous fabric suitable for evening.

**Daytime Designs**

While Stavropoulos’s evening creations are legendary, his daytime styles were also a large part of his business and were widely hailed for their impeccable craftsmanship. By 1965, Stavropoulos began including daytime looks in his American collections and showed such talent for creating his casual styles that he produced suits, coats, and daytime dresses throughout his career. Mrs. Gouletas-Carey, the former First Lady of New York State, commented to *The New York Times* at a fashion show of the designers work in 1982: “He isn’t just good with evening clothes. . . . He’s made me some wonderful suits.”

Stavropoulos’s draping skills were undeniable, but the smart looks he created for day showcased his talent in an entirely different realm. This dichotomy of styles produced by Stavropoulos both in his day and evening looks, established his business in a way that specializing in one or the other never could. Stavropoulos’s clients could be dressed in his designs from day to evening. His casual styles worked to diversify his collections, and helped to solidify his place in the fashion industry.

Stavropoulos’s daytime styles were based on some of the same principles as his signature chiffon creations. Throughout his career Stavropoulos was most interested in exploring the ideas of comfort and classic design. For this reason he included a substantial amount of ease in his suits and coats, resulting in complete freedom of movement for the wearer. In 1961, Stavropoulos commented to *The New York Times*
about his wife’s reaction to the ease cut in his designs: “When I first began designing for my wife, she kept saying how loose things were. Now she understands they should be loose.”\textsuperscript{49} Stavropoulos believed that for designs to be luxurious they must also be comfortable.

Daytime styles designed by Stavropoulos were typically traditional looks and kept closer to the overall trends seen in the market than his evening wear. These designs included couture touches, which made them standout among other ready-to-wear collections and in some cases, command four figure prices.

Early in his career, Stavropoulos designed his daytime styles based on the standing conventions of traditional suit making. His suits were well-proportioned and fit the lines of the female body well. These looks usually consisted of a one-piece, bodice and skirt combination accompanied by a jacket of matching fabric (see figure 3.25). These ensembles were typically constructed of cashmere, lamb’s wool jersey, or mohair.\textsuperscript{50} Stavropoulos also designed coats during this time, which were similarly styled, with single and double breasted construction and accented with patch pockets (see figure 26). Simple dresses with pleats and collars rounded out his early daytime styles and were often designed in silk and tweed patterns (see figure 3.27).\textsuperscript{51}

In the mid-1970s, Stavropoulos designed styles based on Yves Saint Laurent’s Russian peasant look that dominated the industry. He experimented with mid-calf and ankle-length skirts, as well as with long coats and wraps that could be draped over the shoulders. He paired some of his skirts with silk blouses and belted these looks with fabric sashes (see figure 3.28). Stavropoulos also lengthened his suit jackets and minimized construction utilizing single button closures (see figure 3.29). His dresses
Figure 3.25. Stavropoulos suit.
Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1968.
Figure 3.26. Stavropoulos coat.
Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1968.
Kent State University Archives 1991.004.0140.
Figure 3.27. Stavropoulos daytime dress. Stavropoulos runway show, late 1960s/early 1970s. Kent State Fashion Archives 1991.004.0142.
Figure 3.28. Stavropoulos daytime design.
Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1975.
Figure 3.29. Stavropoulos daytime design.
Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1976.
produced at this time consisted of simple A-line construction and Stavropoulos fashioned them in all over geometric patterns and self fabric belts (see figure 3.30). For the runway, he designed fur hats and accented these looks with knee high boots.

In the 1980s, Stavropoulos was also on trend with his daytime styles and he designed unstructured pieces for his collections. His suit jackets were oversized and paired with either blouses and below-the-knee skirts or with dresses of similar length (see figure 3.31). Stavropoulos stuck to a neutral color palette for these designs, only accenting with the bright colors popular at that time. His dresses were also less structured than in the past and incorporated puff sleeves, padded shoulders, and simple style lines (see figure 3.32). Stavropoulos even designed a number of wrap dresses in his eighties collections and created woven hats to be worn on the runway (see figure 3.33).

Later in his career, Stavropoulos did utilize some of his draping skills in his daytime designs. The most apparent use of his talent is represented in his dress and coat styles. He used knit jersey to shape cowl necklines and drape sculptural details through the body of his dresses (see figure 3.34). His coats also incorporated similar draping techniques and were quite innovative. Stavropoulos designed one particular style that incorporated a series of circles to encase the wearer (see figure 3.35). Other styles included the fluidity seen in his chiffon silhouettes and draped softly from the shoulders (see figure 3.36).

Throughout his career Stavropoulos chose to design daytime styles which incorporated the moods and trends prevalent in the current market. Although he did adhere to some fashion industry conventions, Stavropoulos stayed true to his own vision
Figure 3.30. Stavropoulos dress.  
Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1976.  
Figure 3.31. Stavropoulos daytime style.
Stavropoulos runway show, spring 1985.
Figure 3.32. Stavropoulos dress.
Stavropoulos runway show, spring 1984.
Figure 3.33. Stavropoulos wrapped dress.
Stavropoulos runway show, spring 1984.
Figure 3.34. Stavropoulos draped daytime style.  
Stavropoulos runway show, spring 1984.  
Figure 3.35. Stavropoulos coat.
Stavropoulos runway show, 1990.
Figure 3.36. Stavropoulos draped coat. 
Stavropoulos runway show, spring 1978. 
by cutting and designing his looks with luxury, comfort, and classic design as his foundation.

**Fabrics and Embellishments**

Stavropoulos made his name as a designer in his sophisticated and fluid use of fabric. Skilled in fabric selection, Stavropoulos always chose the best and most luxurious textiles for his collections and worked effortlessly with fine, delicate fabric. Stavropoulos often incorporated rich colors and prints to increase the scope of his collections and enriched many of his designs with embellishments. Never one to abandon his ideals, Stavropoulos handled ornate prints and embellishments with such skill that even the most obvious displays of decoration never seemed overdone.

Stavropoulos typically incorporated brocade and lace fabrics in his collections which offered his clients luxurious, one-of-a-kind looks (see figures 3.37 and 3.38). He favored rich brocades in shades of gold that easily worked with the other fabrics in his collections. Many of the brocades used by Stavropoulos involved very intense patterns and he often paired these looks with matching evening coats (see figure 3.39). Stavropoulos also chose lace fabric with similar intentions and created opulent evening looks that utilized his signature draping techniques (see figure 3.40).

Stavropoulos also spiced up his collections with heavily patterned velvet fabrics and intricately woven accent pieces. He typically used velvet burn-out in his long gowns and created eye-catching, iridescent effects with the combination of color variation and directional cut pile (see figure 3.41). The designer also chose to accent many of his designs with intricately woven, open-air fabrics. Many of these pieces were patterned
Figure 3.37. Stavropoulos brocade design.
Stavropoulos press photograph, June 1964.
Kent State Fashion Library Archives.
Figure 3.38. Stavropoulos lace design. Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1981. Kent State Fashion Library Archives 1991.004.0155.
Figure 3.41. Stavropoulos velvet burn-out design. Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1975. Kent State Fashion Library Archives 1991.004.0145
with geometric shapes and could be draped over the shoulders or wrapped around the body. These designs most often enhanced the look of one of Stavropoulos’s more simplistic creations (see figures 3.42 and 3.43).

When it came to prints, Stavropoulos experimented with many different colors and patterns. He often used bright solid colors in his chiffon styles and accented others with ombrés and varying shade designs (see figure 3.44). Stavropoulos also favored patterns with imaginative and natural motifs (see figures 3.45 and 3.46). He used these motifs in a number of different arrangements and sometimes layered the prints so they could be seen through the layers of chiffon (see figure 3.47). The designer even used border prints innovatively by turning them on their side at center front (see figure 3.48).

Along with his exciting fabric choices Stavropoulos also experimented with his embellishments. He used elaborate hand and machine embroideries on many of his designs and often incorporated metallic or brightly colored thread for added emphasis (see figures 3.49 to 3.51). Stavropoulos also enhanced his collections with looks that used all-over sequin effects and interesting palette-style fabric (see figures 3.52 and 3.53). Beading also embellished some of the designer’s looks and could either be used delicately as an edge trim or lavishly in an intricately beaded bodice (see figures 3.54 and 3.55). Amusing looks with scalloped edges, ruffles, and marabou trim also had a place among Stavropoulos’s embellished creations (see figures 3.56 to 3.58).

Always concerned with providing his clients with the finest craftsmanship, Stavropoulos chose exceptional fabrics that worked in conjunction with his fashion philosophy. Whether creating a look with chiffon prints or including an intricate
Figure 3.44. Stavropoulos fabric with variation of hue. Kent State Fashion Museum 1991.004.0062. Photo by author.
Figure 3.45. Stavropoulos imaginative print.
Photo by author.
Figure 3.46. Stavropoulos natural floral motif.
Stavropoulos runway show, spring 1985.
Figure 3.47. Stavropoulos layered chiffon print. Stavropoulos runway show, late 1960s/early 1970s. Kent State Fashion Library Archives 1991.004.0142.
Figure 3.48. Stavropoulos boarder print at center front. Stavropoulos runway show, spring 1978. Kent State Fashion Library Archives 1991.004.0150.
Figure 3.49. Stavropoulos embroidery.
Photo by author.
Figure 3.50. Stavropoulos metallic embroidery.  
Photo by author.
Figure 3.51. Stavropoulos brightly colored embroidery.
Photo by author.
Figure 3.53. Stavropoulos palette-style fabric.
Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1969.
Figure 3.54. Stavropoulos beaded trim.
Stavropoulos runway show, spring 1983.
Figure 3.55.  Stavropoulos beaded bodice.
Photo by author.
Figure 3.56. Stavropoulos scalloped edge design. Stavropoulos runway show, spring 1973. Kent State Fashion Library Archives 1991.004.0145.
Figure 3.57. Stavropoulos ruffled design. 
Stavropoulos runway show, spring 1978. 
Kent State Fashion Library Archives 1991.004.0149
Figure 3.58. Stavropoulos marabou trim. 
Kent State Fashion Museum 1991.004.0004. 
Photo by author.
embroidery, Stavropoulos handled decorative details with the same simplicity and
elegance found in all of his work.

Trendy Styles

In the 1980s Stavropoulos found himself in the most experimental phase of his
career. During this time, women’s role in society underwent significant changes and the
market demanded less feminine, casual styles. Stavropoulos also had a surge of younger
clients attending his shows. They desired more youthful looks from the designer.

In 1983, Stavropoulos produced a collection that many saw as a new direction in
his career. This was his most diverse collection to date and it included a number of cuts
and fabrics not typically used by the designer. He produced everything from cotton and
linen suits to short wasp-waisted dinner dresses in taffeta, lace, and chiffon and also
added Paris-inspired tight-torso silk dresses. These looks included his typical chiffon
styles, but also caused fashion writers to question his “new direction.”

The diversity seen in Stavropoulos’s designs was not limited to his collections.
The entire industry was noticing the changes created by women’s role renegotiation.
Stavropoulos spoke to Connoisseur Magazine in 1983 about where his evening designs
fit within the changing culture: “Women have not changed. Just because they want more
out of life does not mean they have to lose their femininity.” Stavropoulos always
believed that women wanted to look feminine. The changes in the 1980s did not alter his
opinion. In an interview in 1984 with Timothy Hawkins, Stavropoulos expanded on his
view of women and designing: “They want to lead a different kind of life in the night
than they do in the light. During the day, they are involved in the fight – in their career
competition with men. At night, they want to play a different role. They want to be beautiful."^{54} Stavropoulos designed looks based on these varying roles and created draped looks that women could wear in a number of evening settings from business to pleasure (see figure 3.59).

Changes in his collection were still evident at his 1985 showing. In an interview with fashion writer Bernadine Morris, Stavropoulos explained, “I try to give them something else.”^{55} Stavropoulos wanted to produce some looks that could appeal to his new younger clientele. Both Pamela Cravitz, niece of Jan Chipman, and Amelia Prounis, daughter of Lila Prounis, were in attendance at this 1985 show.

By 1987 Stavropoulos was feeling his younger clients’ presence and created short, flouncy designs with above-the-knee hems, a length not typically shown in his collections (see figures 3.60 and 3.61). Stavropoulos later explained these shorter looks to the *New York Times*: “I have more younger customers. . . . I am getting the daughters and even the granddaughters of my old customers. They asked for short evening dress, [and] for suits.”^{56}

During these changing years in Stavropoulos’s career he also developed a new medium for his artistry in suede.^{57} He handled suede with such a delicate hand that he used it for everything from suits to evening dresses (see figures 3.62 and 3.63). Stavropoulos also began experimenting more with silk taffeta, velvet, and satin and began draping organdy under some of his chiffon styles to “give it a different look.”^{58}

Stavropoulos’s evolution in the 1980s proved that after nearly four decades in the fashion industry he could still be as current as any newcomer. Stavropoulos embraced
Figure 3.59. Stavropoulos evening design.  
Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1987.  
Figure 3.61. Stavropoulos ruffled and flounced design. Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1987. Kent State Fashion Library Archives 1991.004.0164.
Figure 3.63. Stavropoulos suede evening design. Stavropoulos runway show, fall 1981. Kent State Fashion Library Archives 1991.004.0155.
change but maintained the simple truths of his own design philosophy his belief in classic design.

**Conclusion**

Stavropoulos’s designs were noted for their subtle innovation, but were never seen as shocking or avant-garde. His consistency, both in shape and form, allowed Stavropoulos to develop several different focuses, while also producing pieces rich in custom details. Stavropoulos ran a successful fashion house that produced ready-to-wear designs with luxury and craftsmanship at the forefront, for nearly forty years. He accomplished this by believing in his own design skill and placing his basic fashion philosophies at the root of everything he did. In 1983 he stated, “There are a lot of phonies in this business, but if you’re a real person and stick to your own style, sooner or later you’ll hit the top.”
Notes


3 Ibid.


5 Ibid.


7 Moritz, 401.


9 Moritz, 401.


11 Ibid.

12 Moritz, 401.

13 Ibid.

14 Curtis, “Greek Designer Adapts Drape for U. S. Figures.”


16 Moritz, 401.


20 Benbow-Pfalzgraf, 624.


25 Pendola, 16.


27 Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.

28 Mortiz, 403.

29 Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.


31 Morris, “The Master of the Chiffon Dress.”

32 Ibid.

33 Hawkins, “Chiffon Plus Simplicity Equals Elegance.”

34 Pendola, 14.

35 Ibid.


38 Curtis, “Greek Designer Adapts Drape for U. S. Figures.”

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.


43 Mortiz, 402.

44 Ibid.


47 Hawkins, “Chiffon Plus Simplicity Equals Elegance.”


49 Curtis, “Greek Designer Adapts Drape for U. S. Figures.”

50 Moritz, 402.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Pendola, 16.

54 Hawkins, “Chiffon Plus Simplicity Equals Elegance.”


57 Moritz, 402.

59 Benbow-Pfalzgraf, 624.

60 Pendola, 14.
CHAPTER IV

CLIENTS OF GEORGE STAVROPOULOS

George Stavropoulos was known for his classic designs and the luxury associated with his label. Throughout his career he attracted life-long clients that depended on his statuesque styles when attending the world’s most fashionable events. Stavropoulos’s client list included society women, royalty, and first ladies who considered him not only one of their favorite designers, but also a friend.¹

Building a Client Base

George Stavropoulos began appealing to some of the world’s most elegant ladies while working at his custom salon in Athens, Greece. He opened Nikis 13 in 1949 and created custom looks for wealthy Athenian women and the wives of visiting foreign diplomats, including the wife of the American ambassador.² During this time, Stavropoulos also designed one-of-kind-looks for Queen Frederica of Greece and was widely hailed for his statuesque, demure styles.³

Although Stavropoulos had gained an important following of clients in Greece, he shuttered his business 1961 and moved to the United States, for the love of his American bride.⁴ Once the couple had settled, Stavropoulos tried his hand at the U. S. fashion industry, unveiling his debut American collection in November 1961.⁵ While the
collection was hailed by fashion critics, it was deemed a total failure by department store buyers who found the collection, “too custom and not for the American market.”

During these early years in the United States, Stavropoulos was able to stay afloat despite the financial hemorrhage, by attracting some new high-profile American clients.

Mrs. Robert Love, the wife of a children’s wear manufacturer, and Elizabeth Oxenberg, the former Princess of Yugoslavia, were both frequently photographed at parties and theatre premieres in his gowns. The visibility of Stavropoulos’s new clients forced fashion writer Marilyn Bender to comment on his ever-expanding client list: “The fact that he is being taken up by a growing number of ubiquitous socialites may elevate him, by next winter, to the ranks of Ferdinando Sarmi and Oscar de la Renta, those dressmaking darlings of the party circuit.” Stavropoulos’s new American following, coupled with the loyalty of his Greek fans, encouraged him to persevere and in 1963 he launched another ready-to-wear collection. This time, substantial orders came in from some of the most prestigious stores across the United States and established Stavropoulos among the country’s elite fashion designers.

From that point on, Stavropoulos launched two fashion shows a year, one in the fall and one in the spring, each typically consisting of about one hundred designs. These shows were held at the luxurious Regency Hotel on Park Avenue, where a cocktail party atmosphere was created and champagne was served to guests. His shows were frequented by everyone from famous singers, to society women and first ladies who found his creations suitable for the upcoming events they would be attending. Livia Weintraub commented on some of her favorite styles from Stavropoulos’s spring 1985
show, “They will take care of any formal party that will turn up in the next six months in New York or Westhampton – or almost any place in the world.”\textsuperscript{11}

Stavropoulos had established himself in Greece as a designer that created custom looks for a very specific upper-class customer. His entrance into the American ready-to-wear market was rocky, but Stavropoulos relied on his experience at Nikis 13 and endeared himself to high profile American socialites that were pictured in the society pages of newspapers. This exposure helped Stavropoulos get his collection off the ground and gave him a client base that faithfully attended his fashion shows throughout his career.

**Life-long Clients**

George Stavropoulos attracted the world’s most stylish women by creating looks based on the simplicity of ancient Greek sculpture. He believed that “classic design is forever,” and sought to make women look beautiful.\textsuperscript{12} While these characteristics should be the aspirations of any designer, Stavropoulos’s adherence to his basic fashion philosophy endeared him to his clients in a way that was unmatched by other designers. For this reason, Stavropoulos attained life-long clients that not only appreciated his designs, but also found him to be a true original.

Stavropoulos catered to a high-society clientele that appreciated his attention to detail and his disregard of the ephemeral nature of fashion. Yveta Graff, an early customer of the designer, commented to *The New York Times*, “It’s good to see something remains stable, not overdone or theatrical, in this world of chaos.”\textsuperscript{13} It was important to Stavropoulos’s clients that they have classic styles that could work in a
number of different settings. Jan Chipman appreciated this quality stating, “You always feel elegant in one of George’s dresses.” She later added, “They’re very safe. . . . You can never go wrong with them.”

Stavropoulos also put a substantial amount of effort into the intricate styling he built into each of his designs. He used only the most luxurious fabric and embellishments while also adding couture touches to his gowns. These small details added up and put the cost of a Stavropoulos gown in the thousands. Fashion writer Bernadine Morris commented on the high price and high-level client that favored Stavropoulos’s designs, “Of course, the hostess who does her own serving should exercise some restraint: those billowing sleeves can dip in the soup. Of course, too, the woman who wears a Stavropoulos dress doesn’t have to worry about serving the soup.”

Even with the high price tag Stavropoulos’s clients saw his designs as investments. Evangeline Gouletas spoke on this subject to the Chicago Tribune in 1974:

The best thing about owning one of his dresses is that it’s a dual investment. First, the clothes are ageless. To this day, I’m still winning the same complimentary ohs and ahs I won with the first Stavropoulos I ever purchased. And second, it’s a marvelous investment in being beautiful! His evening looks are feminine, free, flowing, flattering, and featherweight -- all the elements that make a woman feel every ounce of womanliness.

Many of Stavropoulos’s clients shared the opinion of Miss Gouletas and collected a few of his designs each season. Doris Lilly reported to The New York Times in 1985, “I now have 30 of George’s dresses. . . . I get two a year -- if I’m lucky I squeeze in three.”

The investment quality of Stavropoulos’s gowns was most evident in their everlasting appeal. As an example of this attribute, Lady Bird Johnson attended a party held in the designer’s honor in 1979 and wore a dress he designed for her in 1960s.
Stavropoulos told *Connoisseur Magazine*, “Everyone said to her, Oh my God, where did you get that beautiful dress? It is still in style.”

Not only did Stavropoulos’s clients value the quality and craftsmanship built into his gowns, they appreciated his consistency in design. He produced ready-to-wear collections full of wearable designs that could translate beautifully in any country or at any event they attended. Stavropoulos’s clients collected his designs and saw the enduring style built into each piece as an investment and often wore his creations long after they made their runway debut.

**The Accessible Designer**

Stavropoulos’s close relationship with his clients also played a role in their devotion to the designer. His clients faithfully attended his fashion shows, including his early Greek clients who maintained close relationships with the designer, even after he left Greece. Stavropoulos was quite available to his clients, typically meeting with them at the completion of his runway presentations (see figure 4.1). He would also work with clients in his atelier to make alterations to any of his designs or create a custom look for a specific event. Lynn Manulis illustrated this point, commenting at a fashion show of the designer’s work in 1989, “he will make special dresses for individuals or make changes in a style -- he loves working with clients.” Stavropoulos enjoyed the friendly relationships he kept with his clients and was truly interested in making sure they were completely satisfied with the looks he created for them.

While Stavropoulos maintained close relationships with his clients, he was equally friendly with the buyers that attended his shows. Jerry Solovei, general manager
Figure 4.1. Stavropoulos meeting with clients.
Photo from Stavropoulos’s fashion show, Spring 1984.
of Elizabeth Arden, and Martha Phillips, of Martha, were two permanent fixtures at Stavropoulos shows, as well as buyers from Evelyn Byrnes and Neiman-Marcus. Phillips told fashion writer, Bernadine Morris, “My best customers wear his clothes. . . . I think we’re his number one client.” Phillips also awarded Stavropoulos with her prestigious Martha Award in 1976, for outstanding achievement in the fashion world (see figure 4.2).

The relationship with his best buyers did not end there. Stavropoulos would often travel with his newest collections to some of their stores outside of New York. He frequently had trunk-show-style meetings at Elizabeth Arden and trips to Martha’s Palm Beach and Bal Harbour locations were typical. On one such trip in 1977, Stavropoulos attended a party thrown in his honor at the home of Mrs. Harriet Kahn, one of the designer’s most faithful followers. Clients such as Hilde Gerst, Bebe Pesanti, and Janice Levin were also in attendance and questioned the designer on what his new collection would unveil while they were entertained by the voice of Mal Camins.

Stavropoulos had a charming and outgoing personality that made his clients feel at ease. He made himself available to them in a number of different ways and was successful in blending his business and social relationships.

Clients

Throughout his career Stavropoulos attracted clients from a number of different backgrounds. He established himself as a New York designer and his society clients wore his designs to some of Manhattan’s most publicized events. Stavropoulos also catered to the wives of government officials, who attended elegant affairs in the nation’s
Figure 4.2. Stavropoulos accepting The Martha Award. Stavropoulos and Martha Phillips, Spring 1976. Kent State Fashion Library Archives.
capital where Stavropoulos’s timeless creations could be worn for everything from state dinners to inaugural balls. Not only did the designer’s creations translate well for refined social occasions, Stavropoulos also created designs for stage performers, actresses, and singers, who found his styles best suited for their dramatic entrances.30

Society Clients

Stavropoulos’s society clients initially helped get his name in the press by wearing his dresses to some of New York’s most stylish events. Clients such as Jan Chipman, Doris Lilly, Caroline Newhouse, Livia Weintraub, and Audrey Zauderer were just a few of the names that attended his seasonal runway shows.31 As the designer gained popularity and became closer with his audience, he began to learn what types of events they would be attending and incorporated appropriate ideas into his designs.

The Metropolitan Opera’s centennial celebration took place on October 22, 1983. Stavropoulos knew many of his clients would be attending the festivities and devoted a number of designs in his fall 1983 collection to gowns that could be worn for the upcoming event. The finale for his show came when Stavropoulos filled the runway with white dresses in fabrics ranging from embroidered organdy to net and chiffon. Yveta Graff commented to the New York Times after the show, “George must know that next year is a big year at the Metropolitian Opera. . . . There will be a lot of galas and I will need a white dress.” Since Stavropoulos’s company produced everything in-house, his designs did not need the amount of lead time required by larger firms. This made it possible for him to accommodate his client’s social calendar and this type of consideration certainly showed that Stavropoulos centered his business around his faithful patrons.32
Dedie Coch

While many of Stavropoulos’s society clients knew him first as a designer and grew to know him as a friend, some like Dedie Coch met him early in his career, just after he arrived in the United States. Mrs. Coch and her husband became acquainted with Stavropoulos in the early 1960s and developed a close friendship with him and his wife Nancy (see figure 4.3). Mrs. Coch favored his long chiffon gowns commenting, “I think the main thing about his designs -- is they fit so beautifully, they hung so beautifully, and they were classic. Some of his things I am still wearing.” Mrs. Coch typically wore her evening styles to elegant affairs such as charity events and benefits, as well as opening night at the Metropolitan Opera. She also wore many of Stavropoulos’s suits and less formal styles for daytime and to cocktail parties.33

The Coch’s friendship with the Stavropoulos’s grew closer when the couples began having children. They both had sons close in age, who attended school together, and when the Coch’s welcomed their daughter in 1969, George offered be her godfather. For the occasion Stavropoulos created a one-of-a-kind, completely couture christening gown (see figures 4.4-4.8). Mrs. Coch described the intricate details the designer incorporated into the tiny creation, which is now owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art:

It was incredible because there were layers and layers of chiffon and on the petticoat, underneath, he had tied little white bows with crystals hanging from them. It was just lovely, he made a bib and of course a little hat and then a beautiful cashmere blanket with chiffon and appliqué all over it and edged it in velvet. It was a pale pink with appliquéd flowers and the back had just four little buttons at the top and the rest was open, so when you carried her in the church the whole thing just flowed beautifully.34
Figure 4.3. Stavropoulos with friends.
Stavropoulos, Mrs. Coch, Mrs. Stavropoulos and Mr. Coch, early 1970s.
Photo provided by Dedie Coch.
Figure 4.4. Christening gown designed by Stavropoulos. Worn by Stavropoulos’s goddaughter, 1969. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983.272a-d. Photo by author.
Figure 4.5. Blanket to match christening gown designed by Stavropoulos. Worn by Stavropoulos’s goddaughter, 1969. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983.272a-d. Photo by author.
Figure 4.6. Bonnet to match christening gown designed by Stavropoulos. Worn by Stavropoulos’s goddaughter, 1969. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983.272a-d. Photo by author.
Figure 4.7. Bib to match christening gown designed by Stavropoulos. Worn by Stavropoulos’s goddaughter, 1969. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983.272a-d. Photo by author.
Figure 4.8. Tiny crystals on inside of christening gown petticoat designed by Stavropoulos. Worn by Stavropoulos’s goddaughter, 1969. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983.272a-d. Photo by author.
Over the years the two couples socialized together, often attending Opera functions and parties thrown at each other’s homes. The Cochs’ were also one of the couples invited, by the designer, to attend a dinner honoring him given by the Greek Consulate in Washington, D. C. Casual summer evenings were frequently spent downtown, where the two families would dine on Italian and Chinese food, favorites of Stavropoulos.  

The friendship with Stavropoulos also had its benefits. Mrs. Coch would occasionally receive a few dresses to choose from for the evening events the couples attended together, hand picked and sent over by Stavropoulos. She was also the recipient of large Christmas gifts from the designer, usually containing samples originally made for the runway.

The Cochs’ always attended Stavropoulos’s fashion shows and would accompany the designer, his family, staff, and models to dinner following the show. There, Mr. Coch would often critique the show, which resulted in an embarrassing moment for Mrs. Coch, but Stavropoulos loved it. Mr. Coch, who was entirely unaffiliated with the fashion industry, would give his “guy off the street” interpretation of the designs in the show. Stavropoulos had his son, Peter, tape these episodes for their comedic qualities, while Mr. Coch revealed that “an old woman in Greece would never wear that!” This type of laughter and fun was always participated in by the two couples, who had a lasting friendship and shared many memories.
The Washington Set

While Stavropoulos had the exposure of his society clients in New York, he also attracted a number of high-profile clients in Washington D. C. His initial notoriety with this group came when Lady Bird Johnson began wearing his signature chiffon gowns, during her husband’s Presidency, in the mid-1960s. The visibility of the First Lady and her fondness for Stavropoulos’s creations popularized his designs with the wives of visiting diplomats and ambassadors attending functions in the nation’s capital, including Emily-Angelica Papoulias, wife of the Greek Ambassador to the United States. Stavropoulos also attracted domestic clients such as Isabelle Leeds, the Governor of New York’s special assistant for international and United Nations affairs. Stavropoulos’s elegant styles translated well into the Washington scene and according to the designer’s own count, four hundred guests at the balls celebrating President Ronald Reagan’s inauguration in January 1981 wore his chiffon gowns.

Dina Dellale

Dina Dellale became a client of Stavropoulos’s in the late 1960s and wore his designs exclusively for nearly twenty years. Miss Dellale worked as a diplomat representing the country of Costa Rica and often wore Stavropoulos’s designs for the diplomatic functions she attended. Favoring his Grecian look, Miss Dellale preferred his cocktail-length dresses and classically styled coats. She faithfully attended Stavropoulos’s fashion shows throughout his career and often wanted every design in his collections. In an interview, Miss Dellale revealed how Stavropoulos dealt with his
overzealous client, “I used to go to the showings with my friend, usually I wanted everything and George would have to say that’s enough and wouldn’t let me go on.”

Stavropoulos occasionally created custom looks for Miss Delalle. She stated, “If I needed something special, I would talk it over with him and then he would go in and do something for me.” Stavropoulos also performed all of her fittings himself and developed quite a friendship with Miss Dellale. She noted, “He would not take in any other appointments for about an hour when I’d go in because we’d like to tell each other jokes. . . . He always saved little nuggets for me.”

Miss Dellale also spoke of an incident that occurred when Stavropoulos created a dress for her to wear to a special White House event. While the President of Costa Rica was on an executive visit in the United States, Miss Delalle was asked to escort him to dinner at the White House. Excited about the event, she asked Stavropoulos to design something for her to wear. He obliged, creating her a lovely blue chiffon dress. While the dinner went well, when the attendees entered another room to listen to the orchestra, Mrs. Johnson joined them and was wearing the exact same dress as Miss Delalle. Luckily, Mrs. Johnson’s dress was yellow, but the event was still embarrassing and when she arrived home, Miss Dellale told Stavropoulos about the incident. He laughed it off and the two joked about the event for years to come.

Miss Dellale reported that she still wears many of the looks Stavropoulos created for her. She has even had several of her original designs by him copied and remade so she can continue wearing them.

Miss Dellale represents a client who grew to know Stavropoulos as a friend and relied on his elegant designs. His styles appealed to her for the simple reason that they
were always appropriate for the events she had to attend. Miss Dellale found that Stavropoulos’s timeless designs transcended current fashion movements and could be worn years, even decades, after their original creation.46

_Evangeline Gouletas- Carey_

Stavropoulos first met Evangeline Gouletas at a benefit opening of a Greek theater in Ypsilanti, Michigan, in 1968.47 The two formed a close friendship and Gouletas became one of Stavropoulos’s most loyal admirers (see figure 4.9). Gouletas, who worked as the executive vice president of American Invsco Corporation, a realty firm, resided in Chicago.48 In August 1976, the two teamed up for a fashion show of the designer’s work to benefit the Combined Cardiac Research Fund of the University of Chicago, an organization for which Miss Gouletas was chairperson for.49 The event was quite luxurious, held at the Drake Hotel and was sponsored by Saks Fifth Avenue (see figures 4.10 and 4.11). Nearly six hundred women attended, filling the room to capacity, and proceeds from the benefit far exceeded the organizer’s goal.50

Stavropoulos and Gouletas united for another collaboration in 1981, this time for Miss Gouletas’s wedding to the Governor of New York, Hugh Carey. Stavropoulos was tapped to design her wedding gown, as well as dresses for the entire wedding party. The attendants dresses were “Irish flesh pink” chiffon and the bride’s daughter wore a ruffled chiffon and organdy dress in a similar shade. The designer also created a stunning, white on white evening gown for Miss Gouletas to wear for the dinner held at the Governor’s Mansion, following the couple’s reception at the St. Regis-Sheraton Hotel in Manhattan.51
Figure 4.9. Evangeline Gouletas.
Evangeline Gouletas in a Stavropoulos design, mid-1970s.
Kent State Fashion Library Archives.
Figure 4.10. Fashion show fundraiser.
Benefit for the Combined Cardiac Research Fund of the University of Chicago.
The Drake Hotel, Summer 1976.
Kent State Fashion Library Archives.
Figure 4.11. Stavropoulos and Evangeline Gouletas.  
Photo taken at the benefit for the Combined Cardiac Research Fund of the University of Chicago, August 1976. Stavropoulos made a tie to match Miss Gouletas’s dress for the event.  
Kent State Fashion Library Archives.
After moving to Albany, Mrs. Gouletas-Carey began spending more time in New York City and became a regular at Stavropoulos’s runway shows, occasionally escorted by her husband the Governor. The pair were also in attendance when Stavropoulos was honored by the Greek Consulate in Washington D.C.

Mrs. Gouletas-Carey maintained a friendship with Stavropoulos beyond just business and when it came time for the Careys to celebrate their first wedding anniversary, she invited him to share in the celebration. According to the designer’s son, Peter, Mrs. Gouletas-Carey phoned Stavropoulos at the office and invited him to attend the festivities at the Governor’s Mansion for the upcoming Saturday. She told him to bring his wife and also Peter. When Stavropoulos became apprehensive about making the trip to Albany with such short notice, Mrs. Gouletas-Carey quickly found a solution. She told Stavropoulos to be at a specific gate at LaGuardia Airport at ten in the morning on Saturday and he, accompanied by his family, would fly to Albany with another friend of hers. The Stavropoulos’s met Steve Ross, the Time Warner Communications CEO, at the airport and flew on a Gulf Stream jet to Albany. When the plane landed, the group was met by limousines and a police escort led them to the Governor’s Mansion.

After a wonderful party held in honor of the Carey’s anniversary, around one a.m., the Manhattan visitors decided to fly out that night. The only problem was that the airport closed at 1 a.m., so Governor Carey called the tower and told them he had a flight that needed to get out that night and to keep the airport open until their plane took off. Peter recalled the flight back to the city, “They let me sit in the cockpit and we flew down over the Hudson. . . . Coming in for final approach at LaGuardia there were no planes anywhere, the lights were amazing.”
Mrs. Gouletas-Carey, arguably one of Stavropoulos’s most stylish and intriguing clients, was a loyal supporter of his work throughout his career. Her patronage brought a lot of press to his collections and her attendance at his shows was always reported on in the newspapers. Mrs. Gouletas-Carey trusted Stavropoulos to create her wedding trousseau for her much publicized nuptials to Governor Carey and valued his friendship, making sure he would be in attendance at her most important parties.

Actresses, Singers, and Celebrities

While Stavropoulos’s creations were favored by the some of the world’s most elegant ladies, he also dressed a number of celebrity figures who found his dresses to be wonderful entrance clothes. Actresses Arlene Dahl, Sofia Loren, Shirley MacLaine, and Elizabeth Taylor all wore Stavropoulos creations to either awards ceremonies or in press photographs (see figure 4.12). His statuesque styles were also preferred by theatre actresses Loretta Swif and Julia Meade, who regularly attended Stavropoulos’s runway presentations at the Regency Hotel.

Stavropoulos also attracted clients from the lyrical world. Anna Moffo, Hildegard, and Eydie Gorme found Stavropoulos’s designs appropriate for the stage (see figure 4.13). Gorme commented, in 1981, to The New York Times on why the designer’s styles worked so well, “He did my entire wardrobe for Carnegie Hall – we just closed there and the dresses were dynamite. When you come out on the stage, you don’t have to open your mouth. The audience is always stunned, the colors are so beautiful. Nobody blends chiffon the way he does.”
Figure 4.12. Sophia Loren.
Sophia Loren in Stavropoulos gown.
Image from a poster given to Stavropoulos by Harper’s Bazaar, 1980s
Kent State Fashion Library Archives.
Figure 4.13. Hildegard.
Singer Hildegard in a garment designed by Stavropoulos.
Photo from advertisement flyer, 1990.
Kent State Fashion Library Archives.
Stavropoulos also dressed the American-born, Greek soprano, Maria Callas. The two developed a friendship and Stavropoulos’s son, Peter, remembers her phoning the house, throughout his childhood. On one occasion, when Peter was a young child, he was playing with toys when Callas called from Paris, for his father. She greeted Peter and asked how he was, carrying on a brief conversation, when Peter announced that he was very busy and could he just get his father for her. When Stavropoulos took the call, Callas jokingly questioned why he and his son were the only ones who had ever said that to her.60

Stavropoulos’s popularity with this segment of the market is most likely related to the dramatic qualities incorporated in his designs. He could create looks with eye-catching color arrangements and highly embellished facades that easily attracted the attention of audiences. Whether Stavropoulos’s designs were worn on the red carpet or on stage their look was always striking and suited the stars that wore them.

Yveta Graff

Yveta Graff first met Stavropoulos in the early 1960s, at a mutual friend’s party. The two were introduced and they quickly began a close friendship. At that time, Mrs. Graff was in her early twenties and was frequently photographed at events in Manhattan. Her lifestyle was described by the newspapers as young and frivolous and her first husband’s involvement with the fashion industry made it easy for him to recognize Stavropoulos’s talent as a designer. Soon after their initial meeting, Mrs. Graff began wearing Stavropoulos designs exclusively and became the designer’s muse.61
Mrs. Graff was born in Prague and resided in Paris, before moving to the United States. She studied music, specializing in Czech opera, and has worked with every opera company in the world that has performed Czech opera. When Mrs. Graff was young and traveling between New York and Paris, she was sought after by many French designers, but once she began being photographed in Stavropoulos’s designs, she became his girl. Mrs. Graff wore his creations to the opening of the New York Philharmonic, events at Carnegie Hall, and of course the Metropolitan Opera, commenting, “My life was spent in classical music.”

Mrs. Graff worked as Stavropoulos’s muse throughout his career. Many of Stavropoulos’s collections were actually created on her. She spoke of his process and how he created on his live model: “He said I inspired him. He would put fabrics on me and wave them and then he would say, yes, no, cut or don’t cut. I enjoyed it and I loved to see the creation.” Often the two would sit and talk about the designs Stavropoulos created for her. She recalled, “He would say what do you want to be, a young girl, or a fem fatale or whatever, [depending on the] mood [I] was in.” Working closely with Stavropoulos also gave Mrs. Graff an understanding of his craftsmanship and construction, “Some [of his dresses] have six to eight layers of chiffon. . . . and they float. Color wise, he would put layers of certain colors together to get a very special green or red or blue.” Stavropoulos did not stop at designing beautiful gowns for Mrs. Graff, he also designed skiwear, bathing suits, cover-ups, and even worked in conjunction with a furrier on the design of a fur coat for her.

Stavropoulos also consulted with Mrs. Graff, because she was his muse, on how she should arrive at events when she would be photographed in his designs. He helped
her decide what jewelry to wear, whether or not she would carry a bag or wear a coat in
the winter. Mrs. Graff spoke of his philosophy, “He had the look in his mind, what he
wanted me to be and he produced that look, but it was so different. Nobody walked into
the opera house in the winter without anything except their hands in the pockets of a
chiffon dress. He put together a kind of show.”64

Another look Stavropoulos created for Mrs. Graff resulted in a quick wardrobe
change. At the Metropolitan Opera there is an Opera Club, which sets rules on what can
be worn to opening night. On this occasion, Stavropoulos created an ensemble for Mrs.
Graff to wear which included palazzo-style pants and a long tunic top. Upon her arrival,
Mrs. Graff was told that she could not go in because she was not following the rules
governing the dress code for women, which stated they could not wear pants on opening
night. Without missing a beat, Mrs. Graff entered the powder room and removed her
pants, leaving her with the long tunic top to function as a short dress. She commented,
“It had beautiful beading around the neckline and on the sleeves and it was short, but it
was alright.”65

Mrs. Graff still holds on to some design innovations Stavropoulos created for her.
She reported, “I have a dress that is completely seamless except a few holes for the arms
and for the neck. It’s extraordinary what he was able to do.” Mrs. Graff’s affiliation with
the opera also gave her the ability to introduce a number of singers to Stavropoulos. He
created gowns for Russian and Czech singers, as well as American singers, Shirley
Barrett and Grace Bumbry. According to Mrs. Graff, Stavropoulos also designed dresses
for singers that chose to remain nameless:
He made some dresses that were anonymous because the singers did not want to be known to wear his things when they were supposed to wear garments created by designers for the stage. However, he knew the body and how to emphasize what was great and how to hide what was not so great, so they wore his things anyway.66

Mrs. Graff served as Stavropoulos’s muse throughout his career, even appearing with him and wearing his designs in a 1989 *Architectural Digest* story about the designer (see figure 4.14). The two developed a very close friendship and enjoyed each other’s company, socializing together frequently with their spouses. Stavropoulos dressed Mrs. Graff for nearly thirty years and she stated, “He made my life very happy and easy because he made me look as beautiful as I could be. You know that was a very big gift.”67

**Conclusion**

Stavropoulos’s clients played an integral role in the overall success of his business. His styles embodied the luxury and classic design favored by the world’s most elegant ladies and Stavropoulos developed an important following early in his American career. His clients faithfully attended his fashion shows and collected his creations, wearing his designs years after their initial creation. Stavropoulos, always willing to meet the needs of customers, worked closely with them in his atelier and self promoted his brand by traveling with his best buyers to their stores outside New York. Stavropoulos’s client list included society ladies, the wives of Government officials, and celebrities of the acting and singing world, who all found his knowledge of style and fashion unmatched by other designers of his time.
Notes

2 Ibid., 401.
3 Peter Stavropoulos, interview by author, New York, NY, November 1, 2007.
4 Moritz, 401.
5 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.
10 Moritz, 401-403.


20 Morris, “More Than Chiffon From Stavropoulos.”


26 Photos owned by Kent State Fashion Museum.


29 Ibid.

30 Moritz, 401-402.


34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Moritz, 402.


40 Morris, “More Classics by Stavropoulos.”

41 Moritz, 402.


43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.


48 Stitz, “The High Buy Market’s Long Term Fashions.”

49 Ibid.


52 Morris, “More Classics by Stavropoulos.”

53 Interview with Dedie Coch.

54 Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.

55 Ibid.

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58 Morris, “In Stavropoulos’s Classic Mode.”

59 Ibid.

60 Interview with Peter Stavropoulos.


62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

This thesis attempted to gain insight into the life and career of fashion designer, George Stavropoulos. Interviews with family, friends, and former clients of Stavropoulos provided information about his personality and life away from the business. The designer’s work donated to the Kent State University Museum in 1991, was also examined. Sketchbooks, runway photography, and garments provided valuable information about Stavropoulos’s creative process and are evidence of his technical skills.

Stavropoulos began his career as a custom designer in Athens, Greece before establishing a successful wholesale, ready-to-wear business in the United States. His career in the fashion industry spanned nearly forty years, from 1949-1991. He created styles based on his own fashion philosophy that placed classic design and fine craftsmanship at the forefront. Stavropoulos drew inspiration from the simplicity seen in ancient Greek sculpture and utilized chiffon fabric to translate his ideas. He became known in fashion circles as the master of the chiffon dress and utilized innovative draping methods to create his sophisticated styles. He was also renowned for his evening styles in rich brocades, taffeta, lace, and suede.
Stavropoulos was not only talented in creating evening designs, he also produced classically tailored suits, coats, and daytime styles for his seasonal runway shows. While Stavropoulos always stayed true to his own fashion ideals, his daytime looks did incorporate some of the moods seen in the market during his career. The diversification seen in his collection by producing both day and evening styles also worked to solidify Stavropoulos’s place in the industry and showcased his all encompassing talent and provided his clients with complete wardrobes that could take them from day to evening.

Stavropoulos designed every piece in his collections, exercising complete control in his 57th Street atelier. His designs were produced entirely in-house and only three to fifty copies of each design were made. Stavropoulos kept his business on a small scale and did not participate in the licensing deals popular with other designers of his stature. He believed in his own vision and was not interested in relinquishing his artistic license or following the quick changing trends seen in the industry.

Stavropoulos’s success also lies in his consistency in design and attention to detail. He chose only the highest quality fabrics and added couture touches to his ready-to-wear collections. These features quickly added up and put the cost of a Stavropoulos gown in the thousands. While the cost was high, clients recognized the enduring quality and timeless style in Stavropoulos’s creations and treated each purchase as an investment.

Stavropoulos’s clients also played a vital role in the overall success of his business. Developing an important following of socialites early in his American career helped Stavropoulos establish his business. His faithful followers always attended his runway shows, where they socialized in a cocktail party atmosphere and could meet with the designer following the show. Stavropoulos was willing to work closely with his
clients and would alter his designs for them or create something special for an upcoming event. He had close relationships with his best buyers and would travel to their locations outside New York to show his latest collections. Stavropoulos’s client base included society ladies, the wives of government officials, and celebrities, who all found his creations suitable for the events they attended.

In the end, Stavropoulos was a fashion designer that was very grounded in his life. He kept regular hours and did not participate in the eccentricities that often surround the fashion industry. A devoted father and husband, Stavropoulos moved halfway around the world for the love of his wife and had a close relationship with his son, Peter. Stavropoulos’s friends describe him as a vibrant, energetic individual who truly enjoyed his chosen profession and deeply enriched their lives.
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