



Michael Paniccia Photography

## MODERN FASHION ICON

Jean Shafiroff

By Ava Roosevelt

*“A beautiful gown will always display the talent of a great designer.”*

*-Jean Shafiroff*

The impeccably mannered Jean Shafiroff is an American philanthropist, author, advocate, TV Host, sought after social figure and the wife of Steifel’s Vice Chairman, Martin Shafiroff. But don’t let her elegant poise fool you. Jean is a soft-spoken, business savvy powerhouse with an MBA from Columbia Business School. Her tireless devotion to living by giving, donating not only her money, but also her time and business expertise, earned her eight seats on some of the most prestigious national and regional philanthropic boards in the nation.

**When Jean Shafiroff speaks, people not only listen, but they also open their hearts and wallets.**

Yet, it is Jean’s love of fashion and unique ability to create her own style that has earned her over a million followers on social media. Sitting on the Board of the Couture Council of the Museum at Fashion Institute of Technology has afforded her a unique platform as a powerful fashion influencer. Jean’s name is frequently included on the best dressed lists, as one of the most elegant socialites and philanthropists in the world.

Each year Jean attends over 125 highly publicized social engagements and black-tie galas in the New York, Hamptons and Palm Beach social circuits. Her image graces the covers of publications worldwide, and appears in Women’s Wear Daily (WWD) and The New York Times. This unprecedented exposure creates a unique opportunity to display in person the creations of already established designers such as Oscar de La Renta (she owns 40-50 pieces by him), Carolina Herera, Zac Posen, Mary McFadden, Valentino and Chanel, or to seek out new talent.

Jean has been instrumental in promoting such designers as Victor dE Souza, Malan Breton, Zang Toi, B Michael, and Ron Dyson, all of whom she collects. Becoming the queen maker of the modern area fashion trends takes courage, effort, time and money. Above all, it takes the willingness to achieve utter perfection in the face of full core press, under the scrutiny of the most seasoned editors and fashion experts.

**When Jean Shafiroff walks in, people can’t help but stop and admire the sheer beauty of the experience she creates wearing her high-fashion gowns.**

Jean’s cataloged collection of over 200 ball gowns, both couture and ready-to-wear, is one of the largest privately owned in the US. The collection was archived by two top fashion industry insiders, Lilah Ramzi, a features editor at Vogue magazine, and Natalie Nudell, a fashion historian and instructor at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT.) Her meticulously organized, vast closets are shrines to the genius of modern fashion’s artistic creativity.

**Jean Shafiroff loves and respects fashion, and it shows!**

There is a long tradition of socially prominent ladies being Muses to designers. Jackie O made Halston’s Pillbox hat and her oversized sunglasses classics. Oleg Cassini, her personal designer, became a household name. Nancy Reagan did the same with Bill Blass. Hubert de Givenchy, known for the little black dress, catapulted to fame by creating a personal wardrobe for Audrey Hepburn in Breakfast at Tiffany’s, the movie she starred in.





Former First Ladies and highly visible society figures, both female and male, all carried their own unforgettable style that defined who they were. They inspired trends for history books and 'looks' which have been emulated worldwide, giving birth to the much-admired pedestal of greatness: Fashion Icons.

**Few possess that "je ne sais quoi." Style is what you are born with. Period. When Jean Shafiroff's gowns became her signature look, she succeeded in personifying it.**

As displayed by the sale of Princess Diana's Black Sheep Sweater for over one million dollars at a recent Sotheby's auction, style will always be admired and desired, hence, it is easily monetized. Fashion powerhouses such as LVMH, YSL, Gucci, Dolce & Gabbana, Ralph Lauren, Tom Ford, Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger generate trillions in revenue and employ millions all over the world. Designed

to make us look good, feel good, and to be accepted, fashion reigns supreme.

*Ava:* Tell us when you purchased your first gown? What was the occasion?

*Jean:* The first gown I ever purchased was for my cousin's wedding when I was 16 years old. I was a bridesmaid, and we were all required to wear the same styled gown. The gown was pink with beige lace - a very conservative style. I enjoyed wearing it again to one of the junior proms I attended. Wearing a gown made me feel very special. I was too young to think about getting married, but I loved wearing the gown and celebrating my cousin's wedding.

*Ava:* Was there a moment when fashion became your passion?

*Jean:* It started early! I developed an excitement for fashion when I was four years old. I thank my grandmother for taking me shopping and purchasing three exquisite party dresses for me. I remember trying on many beautiful dresses. I was so excited - you have no idea. Since then, I have always loved style and fashion. In sixth grade, I started making my own clothing. My mother later discouraged me and suggested that we purchase all my clothing. She felt we could never compete with the beauty of the clothing made and sold in the department stores and boutiques.

*Ava:* What draws you to a newcomer rather than to the elite couturier?

*Jean:* I love to support the works of both young fashion designers as well as the designs of more established ones. There is an abundance of great talent worldwide. By purchasing and wearing the fashions of some of the younger designers, I have tried to help their business. The designers are very grateful. They especially love it when I put their clothing on my Instagram account. @jeanshafiroff. I have over 1.2 million Instagram followers. I use my platform to promote philanthropy, positive living and fashion.

*Ava:* How and why did your collection evolve to the extent to which it has become, and why is it still growing?

*Jean:* I started collecting gowns about 20 years ago. I enjoy wearing new pieces to the different black tie charity galas that I attend and support. In many ways, fashion and philanthropy work together. My gown collection continues to grow as I find gowns that I believe are unique and beautiful.

*Ava:* Many husbands lack the support of the true passions of their spouses. How is it in your household?

*Jean:* My husband understands how important it is to support the fashion industry, which employs millions of people around the globe. Many women and men would not be able to support their families if they did not have a job in the fashion industry.

*Ava:* I understand you hope to show your gown collection at a museum exhibition one day and to possibly donate later. Please tell us more about that.

*Jean:* Yes, I absolutely plan to donate the collection to a museum in the future. I would like others to see and enjoy the collection. There is a story behind almost every gown-- why I purchased it and what charitable event I wore it to. Wearing a gown and accessorizing it with beautiful hair and make-up is a little like creating a painting. Fashion is art -- and art is fashion.

*Ava:* Have you considered creating and publishing a coffee table book displaying your gowns?

*Jean:* Yes, I am now in the planning stages of creating a book about my collection. Anyone who loves fashion will love the stories behind the "why"

of the collection. Many of the gowns are couture. The collection consists of gowns by Oscar de la Renta, Carolina Herrera, Victor dE Souza, Zang Toi, Malan Breton, B Michael, Valentino, Mary McFadden, Zac Posen and others.

*Ava:* How does it feel to be able to make such a difference in the lives of new designers such as Malan Breton and Victor dE Souza, and others whose talent you were instrumental in discovering?

*Jean:* I recognized his great talent when I attended Victor dE Souza's first fashion show. Right then and there, I fell in love with his gowns and ordered one right after the show. His workmanship and designs are extraordinary. Malan Breton was already an established fashion designer when I first met him. However, his work was not very well known in the United States. His talent impressed me and I decided to support him. B Michael is another designer whose clothing I love. His work is unique and very well constructed. Most recently I have discovered the work

of Ese Aszenobar who is based in Dallas, Texas. She is primarily a bridal fashion designer, but her couture gowns are also beautiful.

*Ava:* You've been a portal to launch young and unknown designers. What are the challenges they face and how would you suggest they circumvent those?

*Jean:* The fashion business is a tough and expensive business to succeed in. To launch a collection, a designer must be extremely savvy when it comes to business. The larger brands have almost cornered the market. However, there is always room for new talent!

*Ava:* Would you ever consider designing your own prêt-à-porter collection that would inspire women worldwide to find their own signature style at any budget?

*Jean:* Yes, but if I do it, I will start with a few couture pieces first. I believe women can be well dressed on almost any budget. It just takes a little imagination and creativity. I have seen many well-dressed men and women on very small budgets!



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