



Thank you to *Private Air Luxury Homes Magazine* and Editor-in-Chief, Regina Russo, for including our contribution, Margaret's Couture Cleaners interview with Norman Tipton in the Arts & Collectibles section.

## A COLLECTOR'S CURIOSITY AND CHALLENGES

Norman Tipton, a San Diego resident, shares his philosophy on collecting Hollywood vintage costumes and why he chose Margaret's Couture Cleaners to restore and preserve three costumes worn by screen legends and icons Loretta Young, Liza Minnelli and Bette Davis.

*Produced by Katia Graytok*



**KG:** Tell me about your collection.

**NT:** I started collecting 40+ years ago.

**KG:** How did you start collecting, and when?

**NT:** I started collecting movie posters in the 1980s, which segued into props and costumes.

**KG:** Do you have a particular process in mind when collecting or a specific designer you admire?

**NT:** Collecting is my hobby which has enabled me to meet fascinating people. Debbie Reynolds was a great contact and friend whose personal efforts to save costumes from early Hollywood history were appreciated.

**KG:** What would you consider your most prominent pieces in your collection?

**NT:** Barbra Streisand's costume from *Funny Girl*, Joan Crawford from *Mildred Pierce*, Bette Davis from *Queen Elizabeth*, Faye Dunaway from *The Three Musketeers*.

**KG:** Are the three pieces at Margaret's your latest acquisitions, which include the costume worn by Bette Davis in the film, *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex*, *The Crusades* costume worn by Loretta Young, and the long emerald dress worn by Liza Minnelli in *New York, New York*?

**NT:** Yes.

*(continued)*

**From *The Crusades* – Before and After Cleaning and Restoration:** Hundreds of Seed Pearls were replaced, the fur was added back to the collar as in the original design of Loretta Young's Cream Silk medieval gown and cape studded with seed pearls at the bodice and kirtle worn for the 1935 film *The Crusades*. Travis Benton designed the costume for the movie. Benton is considered one of the most important Hollywood costume designers of the Golden Age. Glamour, subtle elegance and exquisite fabrics endeared Travis Benton to the most celebrated Hollywood royalty and he was one of his era's most sought after costume designers.

## Norman Tipton Interview (cont.)

**KG:** What attracted you to these pieces...the films, the stars, the costume designers, or the times and places?

**NT:** I consider who wore it, and the name recognition of the actor, how important the movie was at the peak of the actor's career, and whether the piece was visually arresting. Collecting is about films and not fashion.

**KG:** What else do you collect?

**NT:** My collections and interests are posters and women's costumes. I don't collect menswear because it has no eye candy value to me; a man's suit is a man's suit.

**KG:** Do you have an artistic family background?

**NT:** My family has always been interested in culture. I personally enjoyed vintage comic books.

**KG:** What is the future of your collections?

**NT:** I am open to displaying my collections in the USA and internationally. The V&A Museum in London in 2013 borrowed ten pieces for the Hollywood Costume Exhibition. I have three children who will inherit my collection.

**KG:** Private collections vs museum collections. Is there a plan to curate an exhibition with a museum or gallery in the future?

**NT:** I am open to sharing my collection with museums, cultural foundations and universities.

(continued)



**From *New York, New York* – Before and After Cleaning:** The emerald green evening gown with bugle bead design. Stains were removed and faded color restored. Repaired many missing beads and torn embroidery.

American Costume Designer Theodora Van Runkle designed Liza Minnelli's costume in 1977 for the American Musical Drama *New York, New York*. A commercial artist who fell into costuming by chance, Ms. Van Runkle was known for designs that combined Hollywood glamour with historical fealty.

## Norman Tipton Interview (cont.)

**KG: Do you buy online?**

**NT:** I buy online occasionally and occasionally on eBay. The Prop Store has yearly auctions, but you need to be careful since all the buying premiums and fees can outstrip the value of the costume. I prefer meeting and networking with other collectors rather than working with auction houses.

**KG: In your opinion, what makes people suitable collectors?**

**NT:** The willingness to share a collection and maintain a collection.

**KG: How do you define vintage?**

**NT:** Anything before 1990 that has stood the course of time. In 1935, Joan Crawford's wedding dress, designed by Adrian from the film *I Live My Life* was so popular that the studio promoted the wedding dress. A family in Chicago won the costume and wore the gown to the Birthday Ball of President Roosevelt.

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Note the trim shape of the actress...

Our primary goal was to repair rips in velvet and restore the costume's original size.

**From *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* – Before and After Restoration:** This elaborate costume weighing approximately 60 pounds, was worn by Bette Davis as Queen Elizabeth. The decorative fabric that had been attached for another movie was removed to restore the original look. In addition, velvet was restored in some areas damaged by time. Orry-Kelly was an American-Australian Hollywood costume designer and Australia's most prolific Oscar winner who won three Academy Awards for Best Costume Design. Orry-Kelly was known for his ability to "design for distraction" to compensate for different figure shapes. In addition to designing, Kelly wrote a column, "*Hollywood Fashion Parade*," for the International News Service. Kelly's memoirs, entitled *Women I've Undressed*, were published in 2015. The film *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* is considered a grand historical epic.

[See additional images of these gowns in our Vintage & Costume booklet.](#)

