New Patterns

Jean Parsons brings design and creativity to TAM

NEW YORK, LOS ANGELES, Columbia. That’s right, Mizzou ranks right up there with the best fashion schools in the country, according to Fashionista.com, an independent fashion news site. The list, which debuted in June 2011, describes Mizzou as “not a design school, but a very unique program offering insights into the production and business of fashion. It’s an award-winning department with internationally respected faculty.” Mizzou placed 17th on the list of 20 schools – one of only three public universities to do so.

Mizzou might not be known as a design school, but that’s slowly changing with the addition of Dr. Jean Parsons to the TAM faculty. Parsons was recruited to Mizzou specifically because her research focuses on the design element of fashion. “Adding design will raise TAM’s profile,” says Parsons, who came to Columbia after 12 years at Iowa State University. “It’s visual, it sparks interest, it appeals to students, and design is critical to product development in the industry.”

“Design is not just creating wild clothing,” she continues. “It’s problem solving, and sometimes it’s also problem finding – we need to teach creativity and innovation.”

Parsons puts her own creative mind to work reconfiguring historic patterns to make them more sustainable. For example, she uses coat and jacket patents that have the potential to be cut with minimal waste, sourced through Google Patents (which is not under copyright). She then adapts and tests the patterns using a digital printer, first in half-scale before going full-scale. Parsons kicked off her first semester at MU with an exhibit of such items in Gwynn Hall.

She often uses her own digital photographs to create prints, or she’ll scan objects, such as flowers, to print on fabrics. “It’s been a way for me to put together all the things I love,” she says of developing creative prints on the computer. “I love the tactile nature of fabrics, pattern-work, history.”

Perhaps Parsons’ best-known work is the 2003 Inaugural Gown she and J.R. Campbell designed for Christie Vilsack, the first lady of Iowa. Parsons and Campbell incorporated photographs of stained glass from the governor’s mansion into the pattern, which was then printed onto fabric. Parsons also designed Vilsack’s jacket – using scans of tomato slices – for the 2009 World Food Prize Laureate Award ceremony.

“I think it’s great to show the students the many things that can be done with the digital printer,” Parsons says. “It gets them excited about this area of textiles and clothing: it’s a very tangible example of creativity, design and technology.”

TO HELP IMPROVE SOCIETY, people must understand the factors that promote health and well-being in our children. “This way, we can develop programs that effectively foster success,” says Dr. Gustavo Carlo, a renowned expert on Hispanic adolescent behavior and the development of pro-social behaviors who studies how children develop good moral values, emotions and behaviors. “I examine these and other related positive youth issues from the perspective of parenting, culture and personality,” he says.

Carlo is the newly hired Millsap Professor of Diversity in Human Development and Family Studies, coming to MU from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he was the Carl A. Happold Distinguished Professor of Psychology in the Department of Psychology. He was at UNL for 17 years before being recruited by MU. “Although my wife and I enjoyed our time in Nebraska, we had been thinking about moving to a larger, research-strong university that provides high level support for the academic work we conduct,” Carlo says. His wife, Roxana, is a psychologist and instructor in the Department of Psychological Sciences at MU. “I look forward to learning more about Mizzou and the broader community – I can tell there is great pride and for good reasons,” he says. “I especially look forward to working with students, faculty, staff, and community members in the coming years.”