

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF THE FASHION INDUSTRIES

FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

MEMOIRS OF

MAURICE RENTNER

FROM VARYING PERSPECTIVES

THE FASHION INDUSTRY LEADERS

INTERVIEW WITH

IRA RENTNER

Younger brother of Maurice Rentner

DATE OF INTERVIEW

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INTERVIEWED BY

MILDRED FINGER

Q: Ira, let's start by reviewing your family relationship. You were the youngest brother of Maurice Rentner.

A: That's right.

Q: How much younger were you?

A: Well, I would say...Ah...At least 12 years. Twelve years' difference.

Q: You were four brothers and three sisters?

A: We were three brothers and three sisters. And I...When I left Columbia College, I went to work for Maurice Rentner, and I was there...

Q: How long had he been in business at that time?

A: He had gone into business in 1923. He was on 17th or 18th street, which was then the garment...the district...the ready-to-wear district. Then he moved up to 2 West 33rd Street. That was one big building, and all the manufacturers, like J.M. Silverman and all those other manufacturers, were in that building. And I came down there in 1922 or 1923, I was there about three years or so. Then we moved up to (about 1923 or so) 498 Seventh Avenue. That was then the garment district. That was...

Q: And you say that was in 1923?

A: Yep. That was about 1922 or 1923. Yeah. The manufacturers all...My brother was one of the men who led this group up, in this building. We had then coat men and dress men. Later on they put 500...When the coat men went to 500 and the dress men stayed at 498 Seventh Avenue. Maurice Rentner occupied the 12th floor. The entire floor, on the 36th Street side. And on the 7th Avenue side of 498 Seventh Avenue on the 12th floor. And

he was in the building until about, I would say...He was there until he passed away.

Q: And that was about 1954.

A: Maurice Rentner passed away in July of 1958.

Q: '58. Right.

A: '58.

Q: And he never moved to 550 Seventh Avenue.

A: Never moved. He was always in that building.

Q: Right.

A: Always in that building. He moved at one period, he moved from the 12th floor to the 17th floor and when he made that move, he got a hold of a young architect by the name of Mr. Glich of Glich & Schulke. A young boy. And he revolutionized the concept of showing dresses. Previous to that date, we used to have booths. You know. He conceived the idea of doing away with the booths, and everything was open. In other words, a table was, one followed each other. That idea...And this boy...Everybody copied him. I was in business on the 12th floor, and I copied him and everybody in the building copied him. And that was the first one of the innovations of the dress business. Not being concealed in booths. Everything was open.

Now, one thing about Maurice Rentner is, he was a perfectionist in this business. He knew all details of the business. He could sit down and almost make a dress. He knew all the...You know...He knew...

Q: Had he had any training for it?

A: Never.

Q: Never.

A: But he developed it himself. He developed it himself. He knew fabrics and manufacturers were very happy to do business with him, because if they sold him, they'd talk about it. They'd say, "Maurice Rentner bought it." And he conceived this idea of manufacturing dresses in a very high style. Now, another thing, He also conceived the idea...I'm giving you at random, all kinds of fact...

Q: Sure.

A: ...of the idea of the "Fashion Originators' Guild." Now, the "Fashion Originators' Guild" was made up of a group of dress manufacturers which Maurice conceived sometimes in the 1930's.

Q: I believe the exact date was '32.

A: Something about that...conceived the idea, He had a meeting of the dress manufacturers of...Of the better manufacturers, None of the inexpensive ones. Those were men like Herbert Sondheim, Louis Brenner, whom I remember in those days--manufacturers who made the better clothes. And also the coat people--Philip Mangone--and other people.

Q: Were they part of the Guild?

A: They were the "Fashion Originators' Guild." The Guild existed...

Q: Do you know how many members they were altogether?

A: Originally, there were about one hundred and some odd members.

Q: Were there?

Q: Then other groups formed. A sports division of the Fashion Originators', with a sport firm like Murray Kane and Lloyd Weil, and that group. And David Crystal....That was the sports group of the Fashion Originators'. And then the coat people had their own group. Then the Junior people had their...I was a member and I was the head of the Junior group of the Fashion Originators' Guild. Then from that went the silk manufacturers, men who made the fabrics. Willie Rose and Phil Vogelmann from Onondaga, formed the Silk Guild. So there was a Guild...In 1932, Mr. Roosevelt came in, and things started to change, and everybody was forming groups and unions and all that sort of thing.

Q: Just want to be sure I understand. The "Fashion Originators' Guild," as I understood it, was formed in order to prevent stores from buying copies.

A: That's right.

Q: Was the Sportswear Guild in the same...?

A: The same group. For instance, if they bought a copy of dress over here, they were "red carded." The Fashion Originators' Guild had a central office, and we would notify it that Lord & Taylor bought a copy of a dress, and we'd get a card "noted," and if Lord & Taylor came into the showroom, we couldn't sell them.

Q: But when the Guild was outlawed in 1941, did that mean...

A: No, I think the Guild was outlawed in...I think before that.

Q: The FTC came along in '36. And then...

A: The Guild was outlawed a little before that because...because...This is what happened. You see, Roosevelt was very liberal, at that

time. With another President it would never have happened. The Fashion Originators' went to Washington and had cleared it before the Supreme Court. John W. Davis, who was the attorney for the Guild, he ran for President of the United States and he was defeated. And he went before the U.S. Supreme Court, and his ally was a man by the name of Mr. Filene of Boston. He fought it to the teeth. And he was very powerful in politics at that time. Very rich man. He had a lot of influence, and the first thing, the Guild was disbanded...

Q: But that really had nothing to do with the unions, did it? I mean, that was not an organization...

A: The unions had nothing to do with it. That was another thing. I'll come to the union too. In 1922 or '23, some year about that time, I was with Maurice Rentner, and Maurice Rentner had a factory on the premises, in the back of his place. A very big factory. I would say almost 100 operators, and that was a large factory.

Q: Yes.

A: It was a non-union factory. Non-union. However, they tried to organize, the workers tried to organize. This is 1922 or '23. They tried to organize and they had meetings with us. And Mr. Rentner, Maurice Rentner, did not go along with the union. There was a man who was the head of the union at that time, Mr. Hochman. And Mr. Hochman and Mr. Rentner were at different ends and they couldn't get together. The workers went out on a strike. Some workers stayed down there, other workers went to work, and Mr. Rentner provided for them places to pick them up where they lived--in cabs or cars--and take them home, in cabs or cars. Well, the strike

lasted a couple of months, and Mr. Rentner had an attorney by the name of (I think) Mr. Gainsburgh. Gainsburgh or Ginsburgh. And he went before the Supreme Court of the State of New York and he beat the union. And he was permitted to have a shop, and it was a non-union shop. It was unheard of in those days. It can't be done today.

Q: No.

A: But in those days, he gave the union a licking, and Mr. Hochman respected Mr. Rentner for his fight and things like that, but they became good friends later on. And in 1932, of course, things were a little different. Mr. Roosevelt became the power...

Q: Yes. Well, Mr. Roosevelt came with the NRA and so on. And I assume that at that point they became unionized.

A: Yeah. That's right. See, you have...Mr. Rentner came back from Europe, and I said, "Maurice, don't try to fight the union, because things are not the same as they were in 1922 or '23."

Q: Right.

A: And he let it go at that.

Q: By then, of course, he had been up at 498 Seventh Avenue for a long time.

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: He still had an inside shop. I thought perhaps the inside shop was down on 33rd Street.

A: No. He had an inside shop when he was on 33rd Street. I think he had an inside shop, but non-unionized. Up to that, 1932...All his shops were non-unionized. Because, you know, the wages were much higher in

union shops than in non-union shops. And that was the first time that the union got a licking. He fought them, it cost him a season, practically a whole season. He lost a lot of money, but he made it and he beat them, and he had a non-union shop until 1932. That was an innovation.

Q: Were they at that point...Were they on piece work yet, or were they still on work week. I mean, were they paid by the week, or were they paid...?

A: Some shops were and some shops weren't. It all depends, also...See, he had what we call contractors working. Every contractor works different. I had some relatives and they ran shops, and they ran it their way. Up to 1932, it was very much disorganized. You can do anything with the workers. Because...There was no scale. You know, everybody made their own prices. Whoever owned the shop made up their own prices. So, you know about the Fashion Originators' Guild. One of the things that the Fashion Originators' Guild did...Two things, I wanted to tell you. They disbanded... They had inside trouble with Herbert Sondheim. Sondheim thought that Rentner was getting too much publicity from the thing. They wanted to call 498 7th Avenue the Fashion Originators' Building, and Mr. Rentner didn't need everybody. He was sitting at that time way up on the top. Another thing, a lot of intrigue was going on, within the organization. And it sort of broke up. And another thing was that if you were a member of the Fashion Originators' Guild, you were not permitted to give a fashion show. In other words, a manufacturer would take his trunk and go to Dallas and present a fashion show.

Q: But that was not permitted.

A: At Neiman Marcus, that was not permitted. Today, that's



how manufacturers...

Q: Why did he feel that way about it though?

A: I don't know. There was a certain enigma about Maurice Rentner, which I can't understand. People who worked for him couldn't understand. He had certain definite ideas.

Q: So he was very dictatorial, really, wasn't he?

A: Oh...Oh..I remember if you wanted to do any business, you had to take a trunk and go out to Cleveland. Very often the Cleveland retailers never paid for it, and it cost a lot of money in traveling fees. He banned any kind of traveling by any manufacturer. He had salesmen, and that was different. But giving what we call today "trunk shows"; that was out.

Q: That used to be done, and then it was discontinued?

A: Now, that was one of the things. Another thing, I don't know whether I should tell you this or not, but I'll tell it to you, Mr. Rentner, I would say, was one of the most successful men on Fifth Avenue. Now, about 1929 or '30, he did about \$5 million in business. In those days, that's equivalent today to \$20-\$25 million. I would say \$20 million. He made a lot of money. And he made friends in the building, you know, and they had a club in 498, upstairs on the top floor. A big restaurant and club for the manufacturers in the building. So you didn't have to go out of the building. You went up to the club on the top floor, which David Crystal now occupies. And they gave dances and New Year's parties and things like that. Well, Mr. Rentner made so much money, and he was very, very successful, and he got

influential with many of the men--manufacturers, coat men--in the building. And one of the men in the building he got very friendly with--a coat man--fellow named Seel Singer, a coat manufacturer, and his brother. Mr. Singer left the business, the coat business, and he became sort of Vice President of the Bank of the United States, which is today in the Banker's Trust Building.

Q: Trust Company.

A: And they became very good friends, and in those days, the banks were permitted to sell stock. In other words, the bank issued its own stock. And then he gave to everybody. First of all, you had to be a member of the bank. And you had to be in good standing, so you'd get the stock. A fellow named Marcus was the head of it. I don't remember his first name.

I left Maurice Rentner in 1923 or '24 to go into business for myself...

Q: So you didn't stay with him very long.

A: No. I was there only about 3-4 years. I left him, and I went into business with a man by the name of Charlie Howard, and the first year we were in business, we made some money. We made about \$10,000, and my partner took half, and I got half. We took the money....I went to Maurice, and I said, "Maurice, I made some money." And he was glad, and I said, "What do you think I ought to do?" He said, "Ira, the best thing you could do would be to go to the Bank of the United States and buy stock." And I bought the stock and I became a stockholder, and he lost...Maurice Rentner lost, through the closeness of the men who associated with Seel Singer and Maurice and other men,

at 498.

Q: How do you spell "Seel"?

A: S-e-a-l or S-e-e-l, Seel Singer.

Q: His first name is Seel and his second name is Singer?

A: Yeah. And we...Through Maurice, of course...I was also at the Bank of United States as a depositor, you know. Through him I got very good loans and things like that, when I started in business. And then the Bank of United States failed. His friends...Maurice Rentner, I will say, had close to a million dollars in stock in that bank. Now, his best friends-- like Mr. Singer and Mr. Marcus and those--never warned him, like the day before, phone and say, "Listen, we're in trouble. Pull out, take your money out." It was a financial burden to him, a financial burden to Seventh Avenue. The bank closed. I was in the bank. I had my bank account, and my personal bank...And I was in very bad shape, so that was the story of the Bank of the United States, and of his friends. He had a lot of faith in his friends. Outside of the adventures of his business, which I think he was one of the most remarkable men in the dress business...He did not do well. He bought into Kurzman's on Fifth Avenue, I think it was around 35th Street, right above Altman's. He went into business with Mr. Simmons. He and Mr. Simmons, who was in 498 Seventh Avenue in the coat and fur business, belonged to the same country club. Through the influence of Mr. Simmons, who owned Kurzman's on Fifth Avenue, Mr. Rentner made an investment, and he found out he was dishonest, and they closed the thing up.

Q: Were some of his outside ventures...As for instance, I

understand he owned an interest in some small specialty stores.

A: Yes. He also had an interest in D. Price & Co in Utica. He made an investment, and did not do too well. He made an investment in a store in Dallas with a fellow named Howard Bonwit who was related to Bonwit Tellers. That didn't do well. In other words, his ventures outside of his business were not good. Whether he didn't give it attention or whether he trusted too much in his friends in running the business, I don't know. But as far as his business was concerned, he was the tops. He knew every angle of that business. He knew exactly...He knew about fashion; he knew what women wanted; he knew everything. Another thing just came to my mind. We had a commissionaire in Paris called Garry & Company. And a fellow named Lazar; young man, worked for Garry & Company. And when Maurice Rentner went to Europe, he accompanied him to the shows. And you know, on the chairs, as you know, they put your name on the front. And Maurice Rentner had his name on the front. And I used to sit next to him. So, if you remember, a couturier by the name of Jaques Fath...

Q: Sure.

A: Jaques Fath was very fond of Maurice Rentner, and we'd have a show at 11:00, and I said to Lazar, it's ten minutes after 11:00. I said, "When are we gonna get started? People are coming in." He said, "Well, Mr. Fath won't start this collection until Mr. Rentner arrives." That's how important he was at that particular time. And you see, at that time, anything Maurice Rentner did...

Q: That was in the early...That was in the late forties?

A: That was in the forties. He had a designer by the name of Miss Hill. She was a wonderful designer. Very, very...particularly on colors. She left Maurice eventually, and went with Ben Shaw.

Q: For Elfreda.

A: With Ben Shaw, in business. And he was, in the forties, he came out with various new kinds of fabrics and things of that type, and I would say that the years I could remember, because I worked there at that time, between 1939 and 1949, he had his most successful years. The most outstanding. About...Sometime...Maybe in the fifties. I don't know exactly the date. But Mrs. Frankel will tell you. He had an operation on his throat.

Q: Yes.

A: And somehow or other, from the time of the operation, things began to slow up with him. See, Maurice Rentner came down to his business, I would say, maybe 11:00 or 12:00, and before he'd come in, in his business, he would make appointments with Mr. Gimbel or Mr. Goodman, of Bergdorf Goodman, or other retailers, for lunch. After the operation, it was hard for him to talk, so he gave that up, and he went downtown...See, that slowed him up an awful lot, that operation.

Q: Oh, that's understandable. What do you know about...Selma Frankel mentioned "Quality Street."

A: Yes. Now, Quality Street was a magazine that Mr. Rentner got out in the Fall and the Spring. A magazine, about 20 pages. I told Mr. Rentner, when it first came out...

Q: When did he start?

A: Well, that came out, I would say, about 1937, '38, and I

told Mr. Rentner, James Barrie has a book by the name of "Quality Street," and I said to him, "Before you get it, go into this thing, you'd better check up. I don't know what the copyright laws are or anything." Anyway, he continued, so I guess nothing happened from that, It was a...

Q: It was like a catalogue.

A: It was like a catalogue. It was about 20 pages.

Q: Well, what did he have in it? I'm sure you remember.

A: Dresses, coats, things from his line. The prices, and...

Q: He did have retail prices.

A: And a description.

Q: Retail or wholesale? Prices?

A: I would say...

Q: Because I'm curious if he was selling...if he was...

A: I think it was the wholesale price.

Q: He was just giving it to the stores.

A: Only to the stores.

Q: Not to send to the customers.

A: No, no, no. It had nothing to do...He gave it to the stores.

He sent it to the stores in the Spring and in the Fall, Two issues a year,

Q: How long did it last? How many years?

A: It lasted until, I would say, until, oh, probably 1960.

Q: 1960? He was gone.

A: Pardon me, Until about 1950.

Q: And he started it about when? When did he start it?

A: Quality Street?

Q: Uh huh, About.

A: Oh, the exact date, I could tell you....

Q: Did it last five years, seven years, ten years?

A: That note, that question you asked, ask Paula Neiman.

Q: Okay, Fine, She'll know?

A: She'd know, She was there at that time.

Q: Because that sounds to me like a very innovative thing to do.

A: It was very...Well, it was very innovative, and it was to the extent that it went to the retailer, I don't know whether the retailer paid for...Say the retailer wanted 20,000 copies. I think they paid part of the printing or the photography or something....

Q: If they wanted 20,000 copies it would be for their customers. If it was for their customers, the prices would have been retail?

A: I don't know if it was for the customers. That I don't know.

Q: Yes. Right, Paula would know.

A: I think it was directly for the retailer. To show...

Q: Well, it sounds to me as if it might have been given... sent to the retailers for them to mail to their customers. That would have to be very expensive to do.

A: To be very candid with you, I'm not definite about it. Paula was there, Paula worked there for 12 or 14 years, She had a hand in a lot of this thing, and would know more about it than I do.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about the personal life....

For instance, you pointed out to me in Louis Nizer's book that he had...There was a Friday night dinner. And Selma mentioned this morning, also, but she didn't mention who came to those dinners.

A: Now, on the dinners, on Friday night on the dinners, dinner I would say was between 12 and 14 people. Mr. Rentner had three in help. He usually had two, but on Friday night an extra girl became a waitress. And a lot of his customers...For instance, when Harry Cooper from Los Angeles, and <sup>retailers</sup> retailers, who were from New York, various retailers, came there for dinner... Mostly, I would say, the family plus his friends...A lot of retailers, with whom he liked to do business. And the Louis Nizers were there also. After dinner, they sat down and played cards. Spent the evenings at things like that.

Q: He was also close with his family wasn't he?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, very close. He was very fond...He had two daughters. And he had a son who was 12 or 13 years of age. 12 years of age, who went swimming, caught a bug, and died. A son. His only son. Selma, Mrs. Frankel, being the older, used to come down very often, and Maurice Rentner was the first retailer...

Q: You mean the first manufacturer...

A: ...to conceive the idea for perfume...8:30...A wonderful perfume. I gave it to friends of mine and some of my customers, and they loved it. But they never continued, I asked Mr. Rentner very often, when we spoke about it, and he says, "Ira," he says, "Have you any idea what a page in Harper's and Vogue would cost?" And I said I had no idea, because I did very little advertising with the magazines. And he said it was so expensive...He had some girl run it...I don't even remember her name, and he didn't give it



much attention. And the result was that it sort of petered out.

Q: Right. I have seen some dates that suggest that the perfume business went from 1940 to 1952.

A: That's about right. The perfume business was on the 8th floor, and had a....

Q: In 498 Seventh Avenue?

A: In 498....

Q: Oh, I didn't know that.

A: In 498. The customers loved it. It was wonderful. And it was the first time (Saks had it and all the stores had it) that a manufacturer came out with a perfume tied with ready-to-wear.

Q: Yes, I thought it was too.

A: There was...I'm going back now to 1940. In those days, Maurice Rentner had a Cadillac or a Pierce Arrow, I don't know what it was. Used to pick him up at night. And we were in the same building, and one day I was going down in the elevator, and he says, "Come on, I'll take you home." And he and I were....And he says, "Ira, I thought of an idea. What do you think of it? What about having Anna...."

Q: Anna Miller.

A: Anna Miller. "...and you, Arthur Jablow and myself, as a conglomerate?" Now, I said, "Maurice, it isn't a bad idea. I think it's wonderful." He says, "I'm gonna give it some thought." After that, I never heard any more about it. You see, at that time it was a new idea. See, Arthur Jablow, at that time...Arthur Jablow and Bernice were married in 1937...-

Q: That sounds right. Because...Yes, I'm just trying to...

A: Now, Maurice Rentner conceived the idea--this is 1922, '23 or '24--conceived the idea of an ensemble. It had never been done before. There was in the building a firm by the name of Louis Lustig. Manny...If you knew Manny Kornreich was the salesman there, Maurice Rentner would make the dresses and he would manufacture the coats. And when the coats were ready, and the dresses were ready, they would ship the ensemble. That was the first time the ensemble idea was conceived. This was 1922 or '23. He made a good coat. I would say a very good coat. It lasted about one year. The trouble was that we always had the dresses first, and Louis Lustig couldn't manufacture the coats in time for us to pair them together. The result was that it fizzled out after one year. That was something new.

Q: Well, also, Maurice Rentner was known for all the soft dresses and soft suits.

A: Yes. He was the first one who came in with what we call the soft suit. The suits that had, for instance, softness. Little shirrings in the backs. Kind of like a coat. I see they're returning now to the vogue for men's tuxedo coats. These suits were very soft. They were ladylike. There were kinds of shirrings in the back, and they used to have a tie to tie around and things like that. And he came out with those in about 1939 or 1940, and did a tremendous business with them. And he came out with different colors in gabardine, and you know about gabardine colors--soft pink, orange and off white. And Miss Hill at that time was the designer. She was a wonderful colorist, and he was doing a terrific business in those days. And I will say his best years, I would say from '38 to about '49, I would say.

Now, I told you about the suits. I told you about....Yes,

another one that you can ask is Martha Phillips. She did the...

Q: Yes. Oh, yes. I plan on speaking to her. I plan to see her.

A: And I told you the idea of the boutique, that he told me he was coming out with a boutique. An idea of a boutique. That was in 1940, which was...

Q: What kind of boutique?

A: Well, he said...A little group of dresses of boutique styles. Now he told me, he said, "After all, I make suits and things like that. There are some things I just skipped over." And he says, "Boutiques."

Q: But he never did it.

A: Well, the idea of the boutique didn't come in until 1950. But this is, I'm talking about the '40s. An idea about boutiques. Another one with whom he traveled a lot is Mildred Custin. Mildred Custin was fond of him; they liked each other very much. And through Maurice Rentner, Mildred Custin, I think, got that job at Bonwit's. There was another thing. Whenever a store, like Mr. Goodman or Mr. Gimbel, wanted a buyer, he'd call on Maurice Rentner. He'd say, "Listen, Maurice, I need a buyer. Would you recommend somebody?" They'd depend on him. Very often they'd have lunch, and find out what the coming season...what it looked like. What his plans were going to be. Is the silhouette going to change? Things of that type. They consulted him, a lot of retailers. They came down very often. I remember one retailer--Mr. Shulman--I think he was up in White Plains...

Q: Yes, Right.

A: ....He came to me and he said, "Gee, I miss Maurice Rentner.

I used to sit down before the season to come, and he used to tell me what to buy." I told you...Yes...Somehow or other, Maurice Rentner knew a lot of theatre people. There was (and this doesn't exist anymore) in the '50s a restaurant called the Boraccio. We were having dinner...This was in June or July. And Stella Adler and Harold Clurman came in--they were then married to each other. You know, they're divorced. And he was a theatre producer, and also a writer, and a man about the theatre. And she ran, Stella Adler, ran a school...

Q: For acting. Yes.

A: After we got through with dinner, we went over to their table. They were having dinner too, at El Boraccio. And after we got through with dinner, Stella Adler said, "We're rehearsing a play at the Vanderbilt Theatre, a play called, 'The Flag is Born,' Would you like to come?" And I said to Maurice, "Come on, let's go see what it looks like." So we went up over there, and there was one fellow that was acting there who was terrific. That was Marlon Brando. She told us at that time...She had a daughter and he was in love with her. Marlon Brando. Somehow or other, she didn't want her to get mixed up with him.

Q: Stella Adler?

A: Stella Adler. To get mixed up with the theatre people. But I remember the play...Later on the play opened up and was quite a success. It was about Palestine and the Jews. How Israel came into existence.

[Side 2]

Let me see what else...In Europe, Maurice was very popular. They liked him. Maurice was a regular night person. He'd go out...He loved to go out at night. And, you know, there were very many nightclubs. And he loved to stay out at all hours of the day.

Q: Of the night.

A: Of the night. At the Ritz, they have an outside dining room.

Q: Right.

A: And Maurice had a table. When we were in Paris, he'd say, "Come out for lunch," and we'd have at least 25-30 of the buyers; we'd sit and have lunch there every day, you know, while the shows were on. From the stores, you know, he invited them over, and it was really wonderful. Outside in the garden. They all liked to be there, because they could see all the important...

Q: Life was very glamorous during the days of couture.

A: And he was...Maurice, at night...Everybody liked him. He was a regular fellow. And people knew him, and the couturiers knew him. Jacques Fath invited him to his home, and some of the other couturiers. I know Jacques Fath told me he was very fond of Maurice. He was one of the nicest...

Q: He stopped going, I guess, after he had had his operation.

A: Oh, no. He kept...

Q: Oh. He did?

A: Oh, sure. He went to Europe. I went to Europe with Maurice even after the operation. We went then. Now, we're talking about...I'll show you about Nizer...Sarah Middleman can give you some information...Mildred Custin...

Q: I'm going to see Mildred Custin at the end of the month.

A: There were two or three people that passed away [who] could have given you a lot of things, The production man, Mr. Asch, was a wonderful...

Q: Unfortunately. I wanted to get somebody in production, but I thought at least if I talked to Paula Neiman I'd know I'd get something about...

A: Paula Neiman will tell you about Mr. Asch. Mr. Asch was an engineer. I can tell you...He made then--and I'm going back to 1937-'38--\$65-\$70,000. In those days. Today that would be almost a quarter of a million dollars.

Q: That's true.

A: He was an engineer, and he was terrific. He was wonderful. And wonderful to talk to, Paula will tell you about Mr. Asch. I told you about the theatre people. He knew a comedian called Gregory Ratoff, if you remember. He was very friendly with him and traveled with him. Through him, he knew some other people. And another thing too. Maurice was a very shy man. When he'd go into a room, you understand, where he was not known, he wouldn't push himself. If it was somebody who knew about him, he became friendly. He wasn't the kind who would push himself. To be Maurice Rentner...He was very shy. And he was sort of a private individual, in a way. He...Somehow or other, people who knew him were very fond of him. He was the kind of guy if he would go on a plane and sit next to somebody, they wouldn't be friends. He would never start a conversation. He was a very modest sort of fellow. But to talk to, he was wonderful, and he had a marvelous...I would say a man for all seasons. He knew life in general, because he lived it. He was better known in Paris

than here. And they were all fond of him, The commissionaire...people over there...the restaurants, they all knew him. Every night he'd go to a different restaurant with a different buyer, and he was very well known.

Q: Yes. And very well liked.

A: The hotel where we stopped, the Georges Cinq, where we stopped. The manager of the hotel gave him the best room and...

Q: I think you've given me a very good picture. He was basically a fashion person...

A: He knew his business. I personally....After he passed away, buyers missed him. They used to go down and talk to Mr. Rentner before the season; get his...what the season for the future holds; what changes in fashion....They wished they could....They missed him very much.

Q: So basically what you're saying is that he was really the complete...

A: People looked upon Maurice as the dean of the fashion industry,

Q: Right.

A: All...They all...If a salesman for a lace company sold Maurice, he went around, he'd say, "Maurice Rentner bought this," You know, the salesman was very proud of that.

I can only tell you one other story that just came to my mind. One day we were coming from the theatre--I think the Folies Bergere or something like that--and downstairs in the lobby there were about six men with bags for laces and things like that, who were importers of laces and materials, I knew [them] from New York. One fellow I knew very, very well because he lived in the same house I did--the Century. And I said, "Mr, Freund, what the hell

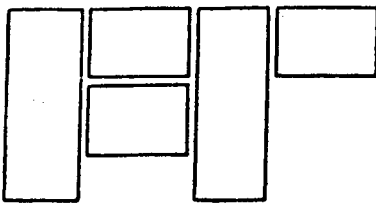
are you doing here?" And he said, "Well, your brother just came in. I've waited here [since] 4:00. Because he..(I am the last one because I waited so long) will give me a very good order." And he used to....downstairs in the lobby...He used to go out having fun, you know. There's a lot to see in Paris; to do in Paris. And he used to say, "I don't mind." Mr. Rentner used to see the lines. During the day he used to go to the couturiers and see friends. He had an awful lot of friends in Paris, because he was making two or three trips a year, and he became very friendly with a lot of those men over there.

Q: And so there was Mr. Freund waiting for Mr. Rentner at that hour of the night.

A: I can only tell you this. He was a private individual. Somehow or other there were factions against him. Some people on Seventh Avenue thought this Fashion Originators' Guild was getting too much publicity. Herbert Sondheim was the head of that movement. And I can tell you this: There was nobody at Seventh Avenue to compare to him. Nobody.

Q: Thank you very much. I think that's it.





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