

## Designer who brought safari suit and unisex design to haute couture

**EDMOND "TED" LAPIDUS**  
FASHION DESIGNER  
23-6-1929 — 29-12-2008

By **WILLIAM GRIMES**

TED Lapidus, the designer who shook up French fashion in the 1960s and '70s with the safari suit, military jackets for women and ready-to-wear unisex clothing, has died of respiratory failure in Cannes, France. He was 79 and had suffered from leukaemia for several years.

At least for a time, Lapidus was to French haute couture what Francois Truffaut was to film. Determinedly modern, he translated the design vocabulary of haute couture into sleek, affordable clothes aimed at French consumers barely in their 20s.

He also made blue jeans — previously an anti-fashion statement — part of the repertory of fashion design.

"In France now, the daughters are clothing the mothers and the sons the fathers," he said in a 1964 interview when introducing his ready-to-wear line. Lapidus sensed a generational shift in France and capitalised on it. His clothes found favour with style setters such as Brigitte Bardot, Alain Delon, Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jane Fonda.

Lapidus was born in Paris, where his father, a Russian immigrant, was a tailor. Unable to afford medical school, Lapidus took up the family trade. While attending a technical school in Tokyo, he saw the possibility of applying high-fashion fabricating techniques to industrial production. "If you have the right workforce, there's no reason why this cannot be done in a factory just as well as in a fashion house," he said.

After an apprenticeship with Dior, he started his own fashion house in 1951. In 1958, he opened the Ted Lapidus boutique on the Rue Marbeuf.

In 1963, he created a near-scandal in the world of haute



couture by forming a partnership with the manufacturer Belle Jardiniere, which mass-produced his designs and sold them at its 250 budget-priced stores in France. Despite the fuss, that year he was admitted to the official French couture association.

"He was one of the first to do boutiques, along with Yves Saint Laurent," said George Simon-ton, an assistant professor of fashion design at the Fashion Institute of Technology. "They became so popular that they spread to the United States."

Lapidus' first boutique in New York opened across from Bloomingdale's in 1974. It was followed a year later by a store on Fifth Avenue at 53rd Street.

"His clothes really fit," Simon-ton said. "Even people without good bodies looked good in them because they were so well tailored. He was a pioneer in making the denim category sexy by putting some style and fit into it."

Lapidus may be best remembered for a sand-coloured safari jacket with leather lacing in the front, worn by Bardot, and for a military-style jacket with epaulets and gold buttons.

In the 1970s, he turned his energies to franchising his boutiques and licensing his name for perfumes, jewellery, watches and sunglasses. In 1989, his son, Olivier, became design director of the company.

Survivors include Oliver and sister Rose Torrente-Mett.

NEW YORK TIMES