



SEEN

Beauty at the Ball



Julie Glassberg/The New York Times

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By **JOYCE WADLER**

Published: November 4, 2009

"MY clams are not in place," the pregnant mermaid in the ladies' room at the New York Design Center Masquerade Ball was saying, adjusting the homemade shell-and-string brassiere she was wearing over her clingy gown. Her long red hair was a magnificent Venus-rising mane, intertwined with seashells, and a blue-green fish tail trailed fetchingly from underneath her skirt. But her bra was somewhat askew and so was her extremely protuberant belly.

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Costumes for Designers

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"My husband is a sea captain," the mermaid added. "We don't know what to expect."

What are they hoping for?

"I don't know," she said. "I just hope it's a good swimmer."

On land, the mermaid goes by the name Maria Capotorto and does publicity for the interior designer Jamie Drake.

But the ball held last week to benefit the Alpha Workshops, an organization that trains people with H.I.V. and AIDS for careers in the decorative arts, was that rare

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Julie Glassberg/The New York Times

The enviably lean [Tori Mellott](#), creative deputy of merchandising for Martha Stewart, was the trimmed-down [Karl Lagerfeld](#), with big sunglasses, a white fan and her mailbox keys worn around her neck. [More Photos »](#)

New York party in which shop talk was not paramount.

The theme was 1930s musicals, and members of a few design firms came identically costumed. [Dennis Miller](#), of Dennis Miller Associates, and three of his colleagues wore lampshades on their heads, with a drawing of the body of a lamp on their chests.

"They're all lamps we sell," said Mr. Miller, who was dressed as a model called the Delphi, adding that the lamps range in price from \$1,000 to more than \$4,000.

They didn't actually denude those expensive lamps for their costumes? asked the reporter, who had come that evening as [Credulous Beyond Redeeming](#).

"Target, \$20," Mr. Miller said. "We're bringing them back tomorrow morning."

The interior designer [Amy Lau](#) and four of her staff members came as cheerleaders. Having gotten the arrival time wrong, they went to a neighborhood bar to kill an hour, which might have been why one staff member literally leaped into the interview with a triumphant whoop, and fell to one knee.

The disco music was not correctly themed, but many of the designers were: [Joan and Jayne Michaels](#), the sisters who run the firm [2Michaels](#), and their good friend [Kate Korten](#), a textile designer, came as the [Marx Brothers](#). The furniture designer [Richard Wrightman](#) and his wife, [Elaine](#), came as [Bonnie and Clyde](#), or rather, [Clyde and Bonnie](#).

Then there were those like the enviably lean [Tori Mellott](#), creative deputy of merchandising for [Martha Stewart](#), who came as contemporary figures. Ms. Mellott was the trimmed-down [Karl Lagerfeld](#), with big sunglasses, a white fan and her mailbox keys worn around the neck.

"I Google-imaged him a million times," Ms. Mellott said. "A lot of the time, he wears a key around his neck."

Her snazzy racing-style gloves did have one flaw: her boss — no, of course not [Martha](#)! — had cut three knuckle openings instead of four. Still, Ms. Mellott was hopeful that Mr. Lagerfeld would approve.

"I think I'm going to send him a picture," she said. "Maybe he'll send me some of his Chanel."

Meanwhile, across the room, the interior designer [Dennis Rolland](#) was a languorous and elegant [Fred Astaire](#), in white tie and tails. Except for the spats, the costume was entirely his, for Mr. Rolland is a competitive ballroom dancer, which made the pounding disco a bit frustrating.

And yes, he said, in answer to a question, he believes there is a similarity between ballroom dancing and design.

"I think the whole concept of style, elegance, a love of beauty and beautiful movement is just as beautiful as beautiful objects," Mr. Rolland said.

While some might find that sentence overburdened with the use of the word "beautiful," we understood completely and waltzed off.

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A version of this article appeared in print on November 5, 2009, on page D2 of the New York edition.

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