GREEN: [00:00] We are interviewing James Galanos. This is for the FIT archives. I’d like the interview by commenting that there is no question about your extraordinary talent and my own sense of you as a brilliant, major designer. One of the questions of course that always operates for anybody who is doing research on this field is what is the magic? How does it happen? Where does it come from? Who are you? What early influences? Why? Why you? I have a very simple system, which is that I maintain that good designer are very much like good buildings, they last. And to me you are the Acropolis so let’s take it from there. Can you start just with the autobiographical things? Mommy, daddy, you know the whole thing.

GALANOS: Well, what can I say? Start from there. [01:00] The seed must have been very very young because my beginning was tender age of, at least, ten. And the strange thing is that I pursued fashion even as a young child, not knowing anything about fashion but my tendency went towards clothing rather than just art.
GREEN: It was [attending?] for women or for men or for both?

GALANOS: For women.

GREEN: For women.

GALANOS: And my father was an artist although he never fulfilled himself totally so I assume that’s where I got the seed.

GREEN: Who were your parents?

GALANOS: My father -- both my father and mother were born in Greece, in Macedonia, and came over during the early part of the century, I believe around ’16 or ’17 [02:00] and being part of that wave of immigrants that came over trying to find a better life and so forth. And the first settled in New York and eventually settled in Philadelphia and ended up in a small town in Southern Jersey. So my background is not one of glamour as far as locale. I grew up in a very very small town, which really had no art per se.

GREEN: What was the town economics like?

GALANOS: Middle class. Comfortable. My father had a restaurant so during the depression years -- I remember those fairly well -- we had everything, a lot of people didn’t have anything.

GREEN: You ate anyway.
GALANOS: We certainly did. But my father was a very good provider and he was totally [03:00] devoted to his children, I have three sisters and myself. And he encouraged me --

GREEN: Where were you in the constellation of the siblings? Were you the youngest? The oldest?

GALANOS: I am the third.

GREEN: So there were two girls before you?

GALANOS: Two older sisters, myself and then my baby sister. So we are about a year apart. And that’s it as far as background goes.

GREEN: Because you were surrounded by a lot of women in your life -- in that early period -- was that part of it do you think?

GALANOS: No, I don’t think so. Not at all. It’s just that I was very much -- even as a child -- a loner. I stayed by myself a lot. I used to sketch constantly, ever since I was able to handle a pencil and I worked my father’s restaurant and while I was working behind the counter or [04:00] as a cashier, I would always be sketching. And it always had to do with clothes; I was just fascinated with clothes.
GREEN: Is there any early memory of a stimulus in terms of glamorous clothes: a movie star, a theatre star, a magazine layout?

GALANOS: Well not really except of course I did like going to the movies and even as a very young child I had a tendency of going towards very sophisticated movies that were probably way beyond what I comprehended at the time. Nevertheless, I was drawn to those glamour gals of the MGM [jury?] like Garbo and [Emory Sheer?] and things like that.

GREEN: When were you born, James?

GALANOS: I’m 61 years old. I was born 1924.

GREEN: Well then you were just, like what, ten years old when that was all happening?

GALANOS: So I remember going to the -- instead of going to the cowboy films I would always go and see those other kinds of films that, you know, the older folk would go to. [05:00] And they just fascinated me.

GREEN: Were you conscious of the clothes at that time?

GALANOS: Oh very much so.

GREEN: And Adrian must have been somebody to [choose respect to?]

GALANOS: Oh yeah, very very much so. Even as a child -- even I would do shopping with my mother and I would
really select her clothes. And I would say, “Mother, nope, that’s not good enough.” And if she said, “Oh, well I can’t afford one.” I would say, “Let’s not buy that, let’s wait and get something...until we can.” And my mother would listen to me and also with my sisters eventually. And I was very very demanding as far as what I thought they should wear.

GREEN: And they accepted --
GALANOS: I had better taste than they did. I really did.
GREEN: Oh I’m sure that’s probably true.
GALANOS: And I must say they followed suite. You know, it was really a question of economics. If they couldn’t afford it, they couldn’t afford it. But I really had a [06:00] feeling of clothes; colors, shade, and I wanted them always to be elegant and well dressed and so forth. I never went towards jazz or just trendy things even. Whatever, they weren’t (inaudible) at the time.

GREEN: Go back to the movies just for a moment. Right off the top off your head suggest some people you thought had the elegance that you eventually wanted to project for your family and certainly for your clients?
GALANOS: Well I never related the two together. I mean the one thing, after all that’s a dream world and the other is reality. I never really went in that direction, taking a role model. Later on as far as I thought had style -- of course I became a very close friend of Rosalind Russell in her later years. And of course Roz was my great drama. [07:00] She could be terribly elegant or very flamboyant. Sometimes got a little bit carried away but basically she had a lot of style. She could put on anything and make it look good. And I learned a lot through her when I came to Hollywood. Although she really let me have complete say. And we became very very close I must say.

GREEN: I know a great deal about that period, certainly and particularly in relationship to fashion because I have done endless work on it. And it seems to me that Travis Banton and the clothes that he did for Carole Lombard and that molding of that image -- because the early Lombard was --

GALANOS: They were fabulous, really fabulous. And the things that he did for Dietrich, like Desire and Angel, those -- to be honest with you, the paisley pleated gown [08:00] that she wore in Angel was duplicated by Yves St. Laurent just a couple of years
ago, almost verbatim. So he had great influence. I mean a lot of the French designers, including us over here, really have taken those people and have used them as inspiration. And some, let’s put it this way, have copied them verbatim. But they were strong, they were good. You had Charlie [Ben?], you had Adrian, and Arlene in the later days was fantastic in what she did. Unfortunately a lot of these California people are not given due credit. When you see some of their really good things, it puts all of the New York people to shame.

GREEN: Well certainly we -- you said something interesting before which we all recognize that motion pictures -- I’ve always said about them that they dealt with the world of the extraordinary. And television dealt with the world of the ordinary. [09:00] And the reality is however, when you look back on the clothes. Leave out the things that are unrealistic in terms of real lifestyle. But I go back to Lombard because I remember the early -- very early -- appearances of her and she was nothing more than kind of a sexpot. And when Banton took her over, he molded her. He taught her to have a stand. He taught her the simplest things that he had learned from Madam
Francis in New York. You know, that that kind of
elegance. And I see that in you year after year after
year where one gets the feeling that the woman who
selects a gown (inaudible) and stays with it and
allows herself to let that dress support the image
that she wishes to project -- the same thing happens.
You see -- when I associate you with elegance it’s
because I’ve seen it. I’ve seen people with new money
[10:00] and not the greatest taste be directed by you
and suddenly you are into this extraordinary person
making an entrance to a restaurant or a room because
she has learned to do it.

GALANOS: It’s true, we have, of course, I don’t know all
of my (inaudible) but I have gotten involved with a
lot of them because I do travel throughout the country
and we have developed certain women who before had a
different image and weren’t buying so called couture
clothes. We are ready to wear but we call ready to
wear couture. And because they have relied on what I
do for them, they have developed -- as you say -- a
style and it is part of them today. Now I can give
you examples of certain women in Texas, Dallas,
[11:00] where there is a lot stylish women and a lot
of, also, rich women who have no style. And some have
developed beautifully and are impeccable and can go anywhere and look as good as the next person in the world’s centers and that makes you feel very good.

GREEN: Oh I am sure it does. Going back again, I love what you said about the fact, honestly, that your taste was superior to your mother and your sisters. Now you use the word style and women’s style. Can you define for me, as you define it for yourself, the difference between taste and style?

GALANOS: Well of course style is something that one develops. It’s not only just the clothes, its everything, you know, the look, the stance, how one reacts. [12:00] It’s all pulling together. Fashion of course is pulling yourself together with objects of clothing or whatever. Taste varies. And taste changes because what we make consider very good taste today in the next period one doesn’t see it the same way. Or you look at it in another light so it becomes tasteful relative to what is going on in that particular moment. So it is hard to really define taste in every particular moment. But there are rule and as I think someone else has said, and I say too, rules are to be broken. But it takes a lot of doing and a lot of know how to break those rules or make you
what you are doing stand up if you are going to fight what the accepted norm is. [13:00]

GREEN: Which is safer?

GALANOS: Well, of course, it is always safer to follow the rule but that can be a little boring. And I think this is what has happened with fashion in the past decade or two decades at this point. There has been a wild experimentation of looks and of course a lot of it came from the young kids who we all followed. But I must be very honest, I love watching what young people do on the streets. I don’t mean the designers because the designers are following those individual persons because somewhere, I don’t know where they have gotten this method of putting themselves together; some of them are characters, naturally. But there is something there with a lot of flair and there is a lot of interest. And that is what has kept me, frankly, in tune with the time. Because remember I am establishment. I have been in business for 35 years now and we’ve stayed on top and have stayed on top [14:00] and trends just get better and better. You’ve got to go with the times but never forget what you stand for. And this is the one secret of my particular success. We still do the elegant. We
still do all of that -- I’ve never given up. Whereas, as you know, on Seventh Avenue there was such a confusion during the period during the hippies and god knows what, so many people went out of business. They weren’t able to cope with the new looks and so they fell away and a lot of new people came in and of course the youth took over.

GREEN: I’d be interested in your reaction to this. You see I believe that style really -- as you describe it -- comes from these kids. It’s an individual process and it’s nothing to do with anything that’s happened before and when you say where it came from or where -- you are [15:00] absolutely right. It comes out of emotional need. Need to exhibit, need to call attention, need to cover flaws, need to do exactly the opposite. And it can be a political statement; it can be a social statement. And sometimes they couldn’t analyze it in a million years. But they have the ability and sometimes it works. You go out to the underground movement and see what they are wearing and if you have an educated eye, you can take a single thing from them and support it by the very world that you design for.
GALANOS: But remember there is always the one person who has that ability to make other people follow. As you say out of the group of young people there is always the one person who has it. And then they follow just like, I guess the prime example being Madonna today, of what -- there is [16:00] an uproar what she is doing. Everybody wants to look like Madonna. Well, she is an individualist. [Bec Miller?] was an individualist, like it or not but anyways she does something that at that particular time no one else did and people followed that. Now you can take something from that. I am not saying that they are great leaders in what we know as style but there is that very special something. And they are the ones who start it and the others follow, they are the weaker ones and they adapt. So, I mean, it’s very interesting and how or why one doesn’t know -- obviously there is something, either in the genes or they have, as you say, an astute eye or they are clever or they know how to manipulate or put things together. And this is the same with the designer. I mean there are some designers that are good and they are very competent, they do a good job. But they rely on [17:00] following a lot of other people and they
can take them, they can adapt to [what’s on?]. They are needed as well as some of the others. But then there are the really bonifide creators, the ones who really have the feel and there are very few of them. There are a few in Europe, in France and they’re a few in Italy. And there may be --

GREEN: Who do you respect as creative?

GALANOS: Well I have to say, in the overall picture, and it boils down for one reason. There is no doubt that Yves St. Laurent is fantastic. I am afraid however that he is played out and that is sad. He is not doing what he should be doing but I think he probably undertook more than he has ever wanted to and I think probably pressured to do too much. But he has had his periods, but he has consistently -- what he has is taste. Whereas a lot of the other designers are terrific, [18:00] their design ability, they are innovative. But they lack taste. And I am concerned with taste. I hope -- at least I am told -- that I make beautiful clothes that are tasteful and transcend the period of time. And so if a woman comes in the store dressed as 25, 35 years old, that says something. It’s not necessarily that you don’t have to but it can. I mean we have customers and bringing
out clothes that they are still wearing, give or take a modification of something. Of course nothing is what it was. Of course you say, “I’ve been wearing a dress from the mid-‘40s.” Of course it’s not going to look like the 1980s. But if the lines were good, I mean today we are wearing pads again so you have to contend with that. Whereas back then they weren’t wearing pads -- in the ‘40s they weren’t but let’s say the ‘50s or whatever. But basically [19:00] at the dresses world at the time (inaudible) prime example, especially evening clothes that don’t age as much as daytime clothes. I mean you can’t go better than that. They were actually magnificent. And even, well of course, Schiaparelli’s and [Beau] began today. If they were wonderful then, they are wonderful now. You see none of us are doing quite that good I don’t think. But they are wonderful. And I just marvel all the time. I mean you can go back if you want to do research and look and look and look. They were fairly inventive. I dare say I don’t think they are inventive today, the designers, in that sense. What we are doing today is really accessorizing differently. That’s what’s happening. And so that makes things look a little different. As far as
clothing, basically the same, it doesn’t change that radically as much as one might think so. [20:00] I mean, you know, you pull in the dress here, you loosen it there, you drop the waist -- all those are givens. Like what you do is when you put a pair of tennis with an evening dress, that gives you a different look, and that’s what they are doing

GREEN: Sure does.

GALANOS: And I remember just back in the ’60s I copied a pair of laced men’s evening shoes, I made them in white satin and lacing. No one had done that at that point, they really hadn’t. And of course David Evins did the shoes for me and it was one of his huger successes. David says I don’t believe it but we are going to try it. I said I am going to shoe it with evening clothes -- in fact, that pair right there, that gal wearing that stripped gown, she has a pair of white tennis shoes under that gown and the one there -- Stravinsky did that photograph. Well it caused quite a sensation. Of course a lot of people didn’t follow through, [21:00] the young people did. Other designers took not of it. My -- I am going to say more elegant ladies of a certain age weren’t going to go along with that look, they adapted it to something
else. But I mean, these are the little things and this is what is happening today the way I see it. I mean you take Armani who I think is fantastic, I like his -- he has taste. And you see all the other Italian designers, it’s pretty awful. They have everything going wrong. They don’t know when to stop. Now I don’t say many of them are very good. Armani is the equivalent of an Yves St. Laurent in Italy. He has taste. I don’t think he is that innovative frankly. But I’d rather see that than see a lot of the other stuff that pretends to be what they call fashion.

GREEN: We also live the same society in which [22:00] a lot of the press, with very little background and knowledge, jump on to whatever the moment is. And the moment usually is the most extensive fashion show, the most exciting this or the most exciting that or the fact that someone writes a major piece on them. I mean I am always totally fascinated to realize that if you deal with people who have been around for 19 years -- they are only 19 years old -- much of what they see is totally new, totally fresh as far as they are concerned, with little understanding that this derivative, this is imitative, this is not original,
this has been done before and better done before frequently.

GALANOS: It’s sad but it’s true, you see. And too many of [23:00] today’s editors and there are a few very nice ones, don’t do their homework. They don’t do their homework. They really aren’t qualified. And it’s -- you know as nuts are great to believe me, I have been reviewed by the best and the worst. You know you just have to accept but there are some that you respect and others that you don’t and you just have to ignore it. And I think any decent designer, good designer, feels the same way. And it’s sad, it really is very sad. First of all when an editor can’t distinguish between a chiffon and a wool you know something is wrong and I have had these kind of things happen to me in years gone by. But they have no concept of what a fabric is or no concept of what a bias was. So, you know, if you don’t know the rules and the tools of the trade, you shouldn’t be reviewing. It’s the same as an art critic or a music critic. I mean, how can you go and listen to [24:00] opera if you don’t know what the opera is all about or even read music? Or follow the score? What have you. So this -- it’s a serious matter as far as I am concerned. Because after all,
listen, you’ve worked very hard and if you are going to be reviewed you want to be reviewed by someone who has a knowledge of what is going on. And also a development of the design from a period of there to now. And you know you get some new editors today and they come in and they don’t even know who you are, there is no excuse for that. They should find out if they are going to --

GREEN: Well also, I discovered there is a narrow point of view on the part of many of them because they have been selected frequently -- whether it’s television or whatever the media is -- because the assumption is that it’s the young market that is the market that everyone keys to and the unfortunate part of it is is [25:00] that’s less judgment of what is good fashion and more associative article statement of what is operating at this moment. By two weeks from now it can all change because the -- there is -- you see there is a wonderful anachronism between your level of design and the culture itself. When you talk about dresses that have existed for 35 years and someone can get into them and wear them and that they are timeless in the same way that a good building is timeless, or a good interior. And it’s there. There is something
missing that has to be examined and a designer should not be placed in that position, it seems to me. And that realistically what the designer does is -- should be examined and respected based upon the total knowledge of the field, his audience [26:00] his past, what he draws from and who his market is.

GALANOS: Exactly. That they don’t do today. They lump everybody into one category and that’s it. How can you put -- take me for example -- next to someone who does [fourth square?] or something else. I mean they are totally unrelated and also it is that in my market is, certainly, just simply because of the economics of our business or my clothes, they are so stratospheric in price that only a certain group of women can wear them. Now, those women have got to have a feeling for what we are doing and got to appreciate what is going on, and have a feeling for luxury, whether she buys it for me or it’s custom-made in Paris. It’s a day they prefer to have it ready to made, ready to wear, frankly. Because they don’t want to take the time [27:00] for all the extra fittings etc. But these people review us should realize where these clothes are going, what they represent, what lifestyle they represent.
GREEN: See, that’s a key word as far as I’m concerned, because the sadness that I find -- when you think about the great fashion editors and you think about Carmel Snow and you think about Diana Vreeland and you think about Mrs. Chase. When you think about Nancy White, when you think about peoples whose personal lives were lives that encompassed the country club, the yacht, the dinner party, the lecture, the intellectual experience, the travel on many different levels. They were able to look at a collection and relate, you see. I find it very disturbing to read comments about major designers by people who had never [28:00] been even on the railroad. And a dinner party as far as they are concerned is McDonalds. Now there is nothing wrong for clothes for McDonalds or any of these areas. I am all for that and I do think that the culture feeds but there is something missing.

GALANOS: No, I was about to say one person comes to my mind who really knows is Bill Blass because Bill lives that lifestyle. He lives with those women, he knows what they want, he knows their homes. And that’s why he is very successful, because he makes the kind of clothes that relate --

GREEN: He travels across this country.
GALANOS: He traveled and his clothes relate to these people. And hopefully we do the same thing. I am not as social as Mr. Blass but nevertheless I do travel lot, I have been in these [29:00] spectacular homes, etc., etc. so people do dress the way we make clothes for them, they are not just clothes that are made for the sake of being made and this is very important. A lot of other types of designers say, “Well who wears those clothes? Where do they wear them?” First of all, you know, there are stylish and very chic ladies who do go to restaurants and do dress up. Not everyone is a slob. But then there -- although one would assume it by looking around -- but no, they really -- I go to Houston, I go to Dallas and I go to their homes and these women really really dress. I mean they’ve got the jewels, they wear the beautiful clothes and that’s -- it’s what they want. That’s there -- and they’ve got the background for it. They’ve got the gorgeous homes, they travel and believe me, they take a wardrobe when they go to Europe and of course, like anybody else, [30:00] they also part of the today’s (inaudible). They’ll have their blue jean too. That’s an accepted classic today and that’s fine but if they do have a blue jean
they’ll dress it up. They’ll still wear their Cartier jewelry with it and what have. So, I mean, they’re contemporary and that’s fine.

GREEN: I think something that is also missed is that society has changed by virtue of the fact that nobody wants to be running around the streets with major jewelry signaling the fact that they could be knocked off. And it has been my experience that the beautiful jewels and the beautiful clothes are worn at private parties -- not even at country clubs anymore. At party parties. And there is a certain amount of great gratification to do that. I gave a party myself in New York last year which three women arrived carrying little -- I thought they were make-up boxes -- and I thought, “How odd.” But what they really were as their jewelry. [31:00] They all disappeared immediately and came out, you know, with the extravagant jewels and I respected them for it. You know it was a way of protecting themselves.

GALANOS: I go to Milan several times a year now and I have very good -- I have friends and their socially involved and they invite me to their parties and I have to tell you behind the doors, you should see the way those women dress and the jewelry that comes out.
And when they go out in the street they are all covered up in a simple coat. They are not ostentatious. When they get out. And they are not all driving Rolls-Royces. Little tiny car simply because they are protecting themselves in that respect but once they are behind closed doors and closed gates, it all comes out.

GREEN: Tell me about your trips to Europe. Do you cover the collections?

GALANOS: No no. I go twice a year to buy fabrics for --

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GALANOS: [00:00] It’s enough that I am working with clothes but I really hate being in the audience. All those -- at times I’m curious. And I worked in Paris 1947 and ’48 and even -- I was with Robert Piguet and even then -- I only saw a collection once. I was just sort of petrified to go down to the show room, I was allowed to but I didn’t, but I did peak once. And that was my only time and then it was 20 years later, I did see -- I met the woman who was the head [fondues?] at the Yves St. Laurent when he went into
his own business. Yvonne [Pernauts?] I think? I always mispronounce her last name. And we became good friends, so she invited me to see a collection so I went in the afternoon. This was after the initial premier, just a regular showing in the afternoon. [01:00] And I am going to say -- I was fascinated. And it’s totally different when you see it than when you see just a few [coverage?] of pictures. And so -- and that’s why I say it’s not fair sometimes when you pick up, say, Woman’s World magazine, you see a few things and say, “That’s not so great, doesn’t look good.” When you see that whole total thing you understand that there is more and for the ones that really are great there is something there. It’s (inaudible). And so you able to get a very fine feeling of what the person is doing. That’s the only time I have ever seen a fashion show.

GREEN: Did you know Chanel?

GALANOS: No, I never -- I really don’t know too many designers. I never have been really very close and running around with [powerful?] group of people. I’ve met Mr. Givenchy who I think is terrific, a very charming [02:00] and of course I knew Mark [Bollan?]. I worked with him although we never spoke with each
other at that time. But now when he sees me he acknowledges me. So I think he sometimes reads about us. But I’ve never met Yves St. Laurent. I’ve shook his hand but I don’t think he would remember. He was here in Beverly Hills for some -- I forget what -- function and I was in the receiving line and we shook hands and that was about all. But --

GREEN: I would like -- have you been influenced by Chanel at all?

GALANOS: No. Look, who knows. Maybe somewhere along the line -- I’m sure, you are influenced by everything and everybody, one way or another. But not per se. Chanel has never been really my great inspiration. I love what she does. But there are others I prefer.

GREEN: Who?

GALANOS: Well of course, in its heyday [Balenciaga?] number one. To me that’s great -- great tailor. I mean actually he started a tailor more than a designer. But then he did create silhouettes.

GREEN: Yeah, it’s interesting that you -- you made a comment before that was actually very perceptive. That they were designers who could not cope with the changing society and who, in Seventh Avenue, just
disappeared and companies went out of business. In a funny sort of way -- Balenciaga who designed for a special world.

GALANOS: He wouldn’t be able to do it today. I think he would be lost. And I think he left his stuff at the right moment. Well maybe -- he made a statement I believe. He didn’t like the vulgarity of what was going on and rightly so. Because what he did was just the ultimate in [04:00] refinement and beauty. There is no doubt about it as far as cut and knowledge of tailoring and --

GREEN: And invention.

GALANOS: There was no one.

GREEN: And he was wonderfully inventive.

GALANOS: And he did himself. Dior was simply a sketcher and he had great people who executed his ideas. But there is a big difference because here is a man who (inaudible) sews. Now I know the technique of sewing but I don’t sew. I mean I can, I do when I was young but I don’t have time anymore to do that sort of thing. But I do understand the fabric, I do make -- I used to make all of my own muslins. And then I just couldn’t because I ended up being the business end of it all so I am a one-man -- still a one-man operation.
So, it’s difficult. So I have two [05:00] workmen now and they just carry on my sketches but I do all the fittings with them.

GREEN: Do you have specific lady clients that will only deal with you?

GALANOS: A few. I try to stay out of that area frankly. I like to be there. When we do the road tours, you know we are invited by the stores, I am there to put my input. Give advice if they want it. And there are some women that really want the advice, others simply don’t. They only want the designer around. And I respect that and I stay out of their way.

GREEN: Did you ever know Charlie James?

GALANOS: Not in a terribly close way but I got to know him around the outside of his circle. And [06:00] I was one of the few people that he liked. He used to write me letters, 20-page letters.

GREEN: You’re lucky he didn’t sue you.

GALANOS: No because I did something once for him and he was—

JANE: Goodnight.

GALANOS: Goodnight Jane. He was very admiring of it and also with respect to the way I worked, he told me. And whenever he would see me in New York on the street
he would corner me and I would be there for two hours standing there not knowing how to get away. I must say he was wonderful but I’ll tell you the truth, I never understood what he said half the time. He was on another plane --

GREEN: Well, I mean he was brilliant.

GALANOS: He was brilliant. His conversation was simply esoteric. I mean, I knew he was saying something important but I couldn’t relate what he was saying in every moment.

GREEN: He was also a troubled man. [07:00]

GALANOS: Oh, there is no doubt about it.

GREEN: And when you walked --

GALANOS: And it was pathetic really in a sense. Because after all, listen, he actually was in the same [light?] as Balenciaga he wanted [great of all times?]?

GREEN: Absolutely.

GALANOS: Granted right at this moment if you take some of those structured things there -- they’re totally -- they’re like dinosaurs. But they are still magnificent and they are works of art.

GREEN: All you have to have is that Cecil Beaton picture, you know the one picture of all those ladies standing in the mirror and, you know, you recognize
what he accomplished. But he was extraordinarily talented as (inaudible) person too.

GALANOS: He was. But you see, he simply wasn’t realistic. He defeated his own genius. Whereas Balenciaga was a genius and also businessman and also was part of this world, so you know, big difference.

GREEN: Absolutely.

GALANOS: And, you know, I am assuming all of this but having -- you know (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) [08:00] I love my feel so I pursued and my knowledge of all the designers of the past, I know very -- I know their histories, I followed, I studied their work, I can see what they are really all about. You know.

GREEN: Give me some indication -- we rushed into all this without doing it step by step and that’s fine. I see you at ten years of age, sketching, influencing your family, making decisions and I am sure there was a certain amount of dogmatism at the time that “That’s the way it should be.” And how to do it. High school? College? What happened?

GALANOS: I went to high school, I graduated at 17.

GREEN: Were you a happy boy?
GALANOS: Yeah, I was -- as I say, I was pretty much a loner because coming from a European family and my parents were very strict and we weren’t allowed to mix too much with everyone and my father wanted us to maintain a certain Greekness. So when you live in a small town and you are the only Greek family and you are not allowed to have friends, it’s a little difficult. So I had to find other ways of, you know, it was mostly a family unit.

GREEN: In what way did the ethnicity work, in other words --

GALANOS: Well because my father wanted us to --

GREEN: Church?

GALANOS: -- no because we didn’t have a Greek church in the town.

GREEN: I was going to say.

GALANOS: I went to an Episcopalian church. But my father wanted us to understand what it was to be Greek, at least in his mind, so we were instilled with the glory of Greece and he was very proud of being Greek and so am I. I can’t think of any other nationality I would prefer to be than what I am. I am an American but of heritage. If one has to have another country as a background, [10:00] I think, certainly, being Greek is
fantastic historically. I can’t say too much of today’s Greeks but the background is certainly magnificent. So I was very proud of that and a lot of it’s rubbed off. I mean, I love Greek culture and I love Greek art and I think a lot of that has rubbed off in my design and my proportions (inaudible), that sort of thing. And I collect some Greek sculpture when I can get ahold of something. But then my father wanted us to know what it was to be Greek, so you had to speak Greek at home when we were children. You had to teach yourself to read and write (inaudible). It was a little tough growing up. When you wanted to go out and play with your schoolmates. We were allowed to in a very sparing way.

GREEN: Involved in any sports at all?

GALANOS: Tennis.

GREEN: Tennis. [11:00] Chic.

GALANOS: So back in those days it was going to school in the morning and coming home and then working in my father’s restaurant. And he said that’s what all good boys and good girls go and do, they work with the family. That’s fine. So socially to be involved with people we would go to large cities like Philadelphia and New York where there is a Greek community. And as
you know about Greeks or any other ethnic groups have their big functions and big balls and so forth and that’s how you meet people and when you go to big cities you find very interesting people. And so that was our, let’s say, little glamour during our growing up years. So anyways, I survived the growing up stage and at 17, I said to my father, “Father, it’s time. I am going to New York.” And my dream was to go to New York and Paris. [12:00]

GREEN: No college.

GALANOS: Well, I thought about it but the priority was -- well I thought I wanted to go to design school. And my father propositioned me. He wanted me to stay home and work with him and he said, “Hey, look. If you want to go to college, fine. Get an education, that will build a restaurant chain.” He said, “You have the education and I have the ability.” My father was not an educated man in the sense I bec-- what I had. So I said, “Papa, that’s not for me, I don’t want to do that.” So he was a little disappointed because he really wanted me to stay at home but I said, “No, I have to go. If you don’t let me go, you’ll have a miserable young man on your hand.” And I never would have fought my father because I loved him, very good
man. But he knew that I had to go. [13:00] So he accepted and he enrolled me in school. I saw in a magazine a couple schools, in those days the one that advertised the most was Traphagen. I had no idea, I had no one to show me or teach me. My school had no class of design. We just had our typical art class a couple times a week and that was it. So everything I had learned on my own. And when I was 17, I had developed a certain style of drawing and sketching that was fairly sophisticated. And I used to buy magazines when I could afford -- 25 -- I think Vogue and Harper’s were 25 cents in those days. And wherever I had a chance to see something that had to do with fashion, I just developed my own taste.

GREEN: Were you aware of European magazines at that time?

GALANOS: Not so much because we didn’t have any there. Those I saw later on when I came to New York and then went to school. So then I enrolled [13:59] at Trap Hagan and after a few weeks I was not very happy. I felt that I was wasting time. That was all at the tender age of 17. I said, what am I doing all this for? I mean the things that they were teaching me, I had already more or less developed on my own. So I
thought I knew all the answers. So what I did is I dropped out of most of the classes or whatever they had to offer. I did what I had to do simply because my father is paying tuition. I took the [draping?] class which was the one thing that probably my basis for whatever I know. I had a very excellent teacher, well there’s several good teachers at the school. One was in the draping department. And she took a liking to me and I found her fascinating. She used to talk to me all the time. She had some kind of background, she had worked with [Levan?] [15:00] people like that. So just listening to her inspired me and gave me a great satisfaction and fascination to learn. And I developed a nice knack for [breaking?] and making muslin. And she saw that I had something so she encouraged me to do more. So that was really the most important thing I got out of school. And then after a year I decided not to continue. In the interim, while I was out looking for a job, I used to sell sketches on 7th Avenue for two dollars apiece. Used to go up and down the elevators and try to earn a little bit of money to help my dad so he wouldn’t have to spend so much money on me. And by chance I -- one of the teachers at the school had the opportunity of hearing
of some [16:00] old (inaudible) class. Some very rich business man that was looking for a young designer to start a new venture and so she called me, I was out of school at the time, and she said, “Why don’t you get over to the Empire State building and see so and so. They are looking for some things and maybe there is something there.” And so I met this man and brought a little portfolio of sketches and he took a liking to me. He knew nothing about fashion. It seemed that he had a very beautiful wife and she wanted to own the business and she wanted to do something. They had everything, a beautiful penthouse, some furs, everything. He was an industrialist, they had cotton mills and a lot of other things. Buy and sell commodities. So to please his wife he was looking for somebody --

GREEN: What was his name?

GALANOS: His name was Lawrence [Lessafoli?] and they had a friend here in California who worked for [17:00] MGM. In fact the head tailor who did all of Adrian’s suits. So he had somehow got involved -- his wife, he and this man and this was back in the ’50s, ’40s rather, late ’40s. They decided they would go into business and Mr. Leslie was going to finance Mr. Winters and
his wife (inaudible) MGM designers. He’d get to groom and grow with the business and actually get them on a small scale, you know, financially. So I went up there and either I sold myself, or as I say they took a liking to me. And then he called me back again, I met his wife, quite a beautiful lady. And so they gave me a contract. He signed me up for five years and then even (inaudible) about anything. I was just happy to have a job. [18:00] They gave me 75 dollars a week which was astronomical back then, it was back in 1943. So I thought, “My god, I’m really living high.” So they sent me out here and so I came out, sitting around in really nothing. Things for some reason just didn’t get going. But they didn’t say anything to me and I sat and sat and sat. I made sketches, we had a temporary office and that was about it. And then finally the thunderbolt struck. The couple were getting a divorce so that ended that kind of thing and so here I was, stranded in Hollywood. And (inaudible) had tried to get a job in the studios. I was always interested in -- my visual concept was to sign with the studios. But I was green and inexperienced. [19:00] I was unknown so it was very hard to break into the studios in those days. You had
to belong to a union first of all and secondly you really couldn’t break the doors down. You had to be known, you had to come from New York. So it was difficult. So I went back east and because this man had committed himself to me and I did have a contract, which frankly probably could have been broken easy enough. I didn’t hold it against him at all. I was just disappointed. So he said, “Jimmy, what can I do for you? Can I send you to college? Would you like to go to college?” And I thought about it and I said, “Well,” I said, “I had thought about going before but I had decided to go to art school instead.” So I said, “You know, let me think what to do.” And we just [20:00] stayed friends and I went home and a few days later I thought well, if he wants to do something for me, OK. My dream was to go to Paris. So I spoke with him, I said, “Look, would you sponsor me and send me to Paris?” I said, “If you do that, I would like to go to school there and pursue my profession.” I said, “I’ll pay you back if you loan me the money to do so.” He said, “Jimmy,” he says, “I’ll do anything you want. I’ll set up a scholarship for you, I’ll see that you’re set up with a family and I’ll send you money, as long as you want. Three or four years, do
as you want to do.” And that’s how I got to Europe. And when I got there [21:00] I was supposed to enroll at the Beaux-Art Academy. I didn’t know anything about [Sean Mecindycall?}, I didn’t know anything. I had no one to guide me at all. So when I went there to start school in the fall, they said, “I think you are pursuing the wrong root. If you want to be a designer, this is not a place for designers. This is an academy of art. Painters and that sort of thing.” I said, “No, I am not interested in that, I would like to go into design.” So then they suggested that I should go to the other place. I was very shy in those days so I got a little panicky. I wasn’t shy about going to Paris, the minute I walked into Paris, I felt I was home. I just absolutely, you know, went out in the streets, I didn’t speak. But I was -- it was like I had been there before. Because in my mind I had always wanted to be there. And I collect picture (inaudible) Paris. [22:00] So even places I had never been, I’d seen photographs just like I’d been there. It’s a strange sensation when you go to a -- today especially, when you see everything on television or you read, sometimes you go to a country and you say, “Well, I’ve been here before.” It takes a little bit
of fun out of it because you know so much that these days -- but anyway I decided -- I was living with this very nice elderly couple that were retired and I asked the -- retired lawyer -- I asked, said, “Would you make some calls for me?” Because I didn’t know whether everyone spoke English or not and I was a little shy of picking up the telephone. I said, “Would you try to make me an appointment with such and such?” And they said, “Who would you like to call?” And I said, “Well, number one would (inaudible) and number two was Robert Piguet. Now it was very strange because Robert Piguet was [23:00] -- at that time he was quite famous. In the magazines I used to see his clothes and they used to be the ones I like most of all, in preference to [Bauman?] was a big star. I had met Bauman once out here at California in that period I was here in California. So I met him through a French friend. And then there was -- who else was there at the time? You had Bauman, you had -- there were a lot of (inaudible) and people like (inaudible). But the one, the really two people that I really wanted to see was (inaudible) and Dior had just -- no he opened the following year. And there was one or two others.

GREEN: Was [Desseh?] working at that time?
GALANOS: [Desseh?], yes. But he was still not as acknowledged as he was [24:00] maybe five years later. So they called, they called Bauman too and he wasn’t in town at the time and there was one other designer, I forget now which one. Anyway, (inaudible) I couldn’t get into. Piguet accepted so I went and of course he had a secretary who spoke English because he didn’t speak English at all. So they sent me up to his apartment room and he asked me, “What you want?” I said, “I want to be a designer, I want to work in your house.” And he said, “Why?” And I explained why and he looked at my work and then he said, “I’m very sorry but we don’t have anything.” I was disappointed. And I said, “Would you keep me in mind?” [25:00] I said, “I’ll do anything.” And he said, “If something should come up, we’ll contact you.” Well, the next day I got a call from Piguet and they said, “Please come and see such and such person in his house with the business administrator.” And so I went and he told me, he said, “What do you want at this house?” And I said, “I just want to draw, I’ll do anything. I just want to learn whatever you can teach me and I’ll do anything.” Whatever. He said, “Well, Mr. Piguet liked your work. He liked your sketches. We don’t know exactly what to
do." He said, [26:00] “Do you have equipment to work?” I said, “No, I came over as a student.” And he said, “Well, that presents a little bit of a problem.” He said, “We have (inaudible) paying you if you don’t have any working [license?] it will be difficult.” I said, “I don’t care, I don’t want any money.” I said, “All I want is to be allowed to work and to do whatever I can to learn.” So he said, “OK.” So that’s about it. I came in and it was at the tail end of the season and they were -- there had been weeks that were going to be in the new collection so they said come back at such and such a time and we will start working on the spring collection. And I did and the first thing we ended up needing -- Mark [Bolland?] was the designer then [27:00] and there was another young fellow who did the accessories and myself. So I was a novice. I sat outside of Mr. Piguet’s room in a little anteroom and then I was given an assignment. He said, “I want you to make sketches.” And each one was given -- it was given the instructions of what to do. He said, “I want you to work around a theme.” At the time he said something, butterflies, I don’t know what. And I was supposed to sketch all kinds of ideas.
GREEN:  (inaudible)

GALANOS: (inaudible). Everything is related to a butterfly or a shape of butterfly or whatever. And then of course before that we spent days looking at fabrics. The fabric men would come there and we all sat around a table and we were all asked to make our [28:00] opinions of the fabrics, the (inaudible), so forth and so on. He was very nice and like I said was very shy in those days.

GREEN:  How old was Piguet at that time?

GALANOS:  I would say he was a man, at that time, in his forties.

GREEN:  I’ll stop you.

END OF AUDIO FILE