

# GEOFFREY BEENE

IN THE NEWS

**V** MAGAZINE  
issue 56 Winter 2008/2009



release

# FORCE OF FASHION

**A NEW BOOK CHECKS OUT THE LOOKS AND LEGACY OF THE RULE-BREAKING AMERICAN DESIGNER GEOFFREY BEENE**

The late master Geoffrey Beene stitched his first label into the back of a dress in the spring of 1963. A privileged son of Louisiana doctors, medical school was not to his taste—he'd rather "cut for the body, not into it," as *The Guardian* wrote in his obituary—so Beene decamped to New York's Seventh Avenue, and once there, rose fast. He became equally famous for breaking rules (diamonds in a plastic bracelet? polyester in a couture show?!) as for finding new ways to make fabric dance with a woman's body. Seams spiraled around the figure; heavy industrial zippers attached lace to chiffon; straps suspended sections of fabric in impossible forms. Beene's anatomical understanding of the body allowed him to design for it like no one had before.

Last year, when the CFDA magazine editor-in-chief Kim Hastreiter to write a book in honor of Mr. Beene, who passed away in 2004, she responded characteristically. "Control freak that I am, I said I'd only do it if they gave me total control over the whole book. I knew Mr. Beene's aesthetic, personality, and work so well—I didn't want someone else, who didn't, to mess it up."



Hastreiter met Beene over twenty years ago. In her then-fledgling magazine, she ran a story titled "Teen Loves Beene," and to her surprise, he read it, loved it, and sent her a letter saying so. Thus began a long friendship. Yes, Beene designed dresses for a moneyed uptown crowd, and Hastreiter created magazine pages for a grungier downtown set, but the two could not have been more alike—both were unrelentingly committed to doing things their own way, concerned with creative purity, not peer approval.

"Commercial success often comes to those who are the cutest, make the most noise socially, and hype the press, and Geoffrey Beene was none of these things," says Hastreiter. "But in the end, those are not the kinds of successes that make the history books." Beene's successes are. And as the writer of the history book about him, Hastreiter should know. **Jacob Brown**

Photography, from left: Andrew Eccles; Jack Deutsch  
*Geoffrey Beene* is out now from Assouline