

## Renowned interior designer, Mario Buatta: 'The Prince of Chintz' dies at 82

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*Sept. 14, 2012: Mario Buatta was a guest speaker at Historic Richmond Town during an illustrated lecture titled "If You Can't Hide It, Decorate It!"*

Mario Buatta, one of the world's foremost interior designers and the highly revered Staten Island son who was affectionately referred to as "The Prince of Chintz," has died. He was 82.

Buatta, the son of Olive and Felix Buatta, was born on Oct. 20, 1935 and was raised in the North Shore community of West Brighton together with his brother, Joseph.



*Oct. 19, 2010: Interior designer Mario Buatta, right, is joined in the Third County Courthouse by Barnett Shepherd, Alice Diamond and Jean Roland, co-chairs of a recent fundraiser for Historic Richmond Town. (Courtesy of Dr. Meryl Efron)*

After graduating from Curtis High School, Buatta attended Wagner College and went on to study architecture at Manhattan's Cooper Union.

While two of his uncles were architects and one of his grandfathers was a builder, Buatta discovered early on that he wasn't interested in the mechanics of building a home. He much preferred hunting down antiques shops with his favorite aunt, Mary Mauro. He called her "Auntie Mame." It was Mauro who Buatta never failed to mention as a strong early influence.

The work of the internationally renowned and respected decorator, who was regaled for his English Cottage style and who once famously characterized dust as "a protective covering for fine furniture," has been featured in decorator show houses and regularly appeared within the pages of magazines, including Architectural Digest, Vogue, House Beautiful and Town & Country.





*Sept. 25, 2011: Attending the inaugural Plantation Barbecue sponsored by the Friends of the Seguine Mansion are, from left, Louis and Lorraine Pillarella, Christina Mantz, honoree Tina Johnstone, and Mario Buatta. (Staten Island Advance/Hilton Flores)*

Buatta's client roster included such notables as Mariah Carey, Billy Joel, Charlotte Ford and Malcom Forbes. He also waved his magical design wand into the West 57th Street penthouse of Wilbur Ross, the secretary of commerce, and his wife, Hilary.

Among the myriad honors Buatta received was the renaming of the New York School of Interior Design's materials library as the "Mario Buatta Atelier."

When asked about his success, Buatta, a Manhattan resident, said: "To be a good designer takes a lot of patience. You have to study a great deal. Schooling is as important as on-the-job training. You have to be positive about working for someone whose work you respect. Not just anyone, someone who appeals to your taste and your feeling. I was fortunate to do that with people like Elisabeth Draper and Keith Levine."

But the "Prince of Chintz" -- a title bestowed on him by the late television reporter, Chauncey Howell -- wasn't only known for his masterful interior design. He was also known for what one writer once described as an "outlandish personality (with a) penchant for pranks."

"He was a jokester, because he wanted us to not take things too seriously," said Emily Eerdmans, design historian and co-author of Buatta's book, "Mario Buatta: 50 Years of Interior Decoration."

Eerdmans also noted Buatta's design genius.

"He brought color, comfort and beauty to his rooms and he thought of his rooms as backdrops for his clients to live their best life. And when you were in his rooms, it made you feel like a glass of champagne. You just felt everything was going to be all right. "

Sandra Zummo, former features and Home editor for the Staten Island Advance, spoke about Buatta's pranks.

"Mario was a courtly gentleman and court jester," Zummo said. "On the one hand, he was impeccably dressed to the nines . Yet, there were times when, as a joke, he would give you a Tiffany box with a broken gift."

She also praised him for his talents.

"He was such a master of color and pattern. You looked at his rooms and you didn't know where to look first. The rooms were so joyous and you felt good being there with colors and florals. "

Jean Roland, a friend of Buatta, recalled the time she met Mario.

"(It was in) a Staten Island antique shop, when he was 17, and we fought over a Battersea Box. He collected them, and we were fighting over a \$5 box. He was irresistible, unpredicted with a fine madness. I knew he was destined for greatness in the decorating world. And, whenever he was on Staten Island he would visit and move my furniture around."

She also remembered him for his kind-hearted, fun-loving side.

"He was great fun and he was very special. Sometimes he would lecture and put on this crazy wig, but it was a piece of fur that he plopped on the top of his head. And sometimes he would throw a plastic cockroach on the table in a restaurant."

Alice Diamond, wife of late Advance Publisher Richard E. Diamond, spoke fondly of Buatta's relationship with her family.

"I met Mario because of his talent and he became a major part of my family," she said. "He was a good friend for more than 50 years of my children and all their children, who all loved their 'grand uncle.'"

Community leader Norma D'Arrigo, wife of the late Surrogate Charles D'Arrigo, and an Advance Woman of Achievement, recalled Buatta's sense of humor.

"He had a wonderful sense of humor. You never expected someone like him to have the sense of humor that he had. He was very generous with his expertise on Staten Island. We were very proud of him and he was honored several times on Staten Island for his work.

"Mario was a native Staten Islander and Staten Island was always very proud of him and his success. And we never forgot him and he never forgot us."



*From left, Alice Diamond, Caroline Harrison, Kathy and her father, Donald Newhouse, Mario Buatta and Timothy Harrison during a surprise visit to the newsroom at the Staten Island Advance. Aug. 8, 2012 (Staten Island Advance/Jan Somma Hammel)*

Buatta is survived by his brother, Joseph.

Funeral arrangements are being handled by Harmon Funeral Home, West Brighton.

Visitors will be received on Friday from 4 to 8 p.m.

A funeral mass is set for Saturday at 10 a.m. in Sacred Heart R.C. Church, also in West Brighton. Burial will follow in Moravian Cemetery, New Dorp.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be sent to the New York School of Interior Design.