



## John Winniford "Winn" Morton

December 12, 1928 - April 22, 2022

Dallas designer, Winn Morton, died peacefully at his home on April 22 with his faithful companions, Max and Lily, by his side. He was preceded by his partner of 53 years, Harry Lewis, in 2006.

Winn was also predeceased by his parents, Jack and Ethel, and one brother Jack Batchler Morton. Surviving family includes nieces Melissa Morton Lackman (Vernon) of Santa Clarita, CA; and Nanci Morton Harper (Robert) of Sacramento, CA, along with great-nieces and great-nephews. Winn leaves behind his loyal assistant and true friend, Manuel "Chuy" Montelongo-Valdez. Many devoted friends and work associates in Texas and all over the country mourn his passing.

Born in Lancaster, Texas on December 12, 1928, Winn was a talented child who took art lessons from the late Alexander Hogue. He attended Highland Park schools, and briefly, Southern Methodist University. Winn's obsession with the circus paved the way to Ringling School of Art, where he honed his drawing skills before heading to New York to attend Parsons School of Design. In 1949, he joined the United Scenic Artists Union.

Early career highlights include designing for "The Arthur Godfrey Show" at CBS, the Roxy Theater, and the 1964-65 New York World's Fair for Olympic ice skater Dick Button. Legendary bandleader Guy Lombardo engaged Winn

for 17 years to design hundreds of costumes for the Jones Beach Marine Theater. Winn worked with every top costume workroom in New York, including Michael-Jon. As a designer for both Broadway and off- Broadway productions, Winn always personally selected his fabrics and trims. “Winn lived for Show Business!”

In 1975, Winn was retained as Art Director for Six Flags Show Productions by the late David Blackburn. He described Winn as “an immense talent with immaculate taste”. Winn and Harry moved back to the Dallas area in 1977. Winn continued to design costumes for the Hanneford Circus and Circus Vargas, including for performers, ringmasters, and elephants. In 1985, Winn designed “The Living Unicorn” for the Ringling Brothers Circus, for the 115th Edition of the Greatest Show on Earth. This achievement was a lifelong dream come true.

The Texas Rose Festival, held each year in Tyler, hired Winn as designer in 1982, and for over 35 years he transformed the pageant with his talent. Each season he outdid the previous year with his artistry for the Queen, Duchess, and Ladies-in Waiting, along with countless debutantes who will never forget working with Winn. Known as the “King of Rhinestones and Feathers” Winn declined requests to design regular clothes: “That would bore me to tears!”.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s Winn designed for extravagant charity balls and lavish parties for prominent Dallas socialites. He also created wedding gowns for many private weddings. His clientele was discerning, and they knew Winn’s imagination would exceed their expectations.

In 2007, Winn was the Exhibition Designer for “Balenciaga and His Legacy: Haute Couture from the Texas Fashion Collection” at the Meadows Museum in Dallas. In 2019, film producer and director Ashley Bush made a short film titled “The Queen’s New Clothes” which captured the essence of Winn Morton and the scope of his work.

In 2019, Winn retired at 91, after designing costumes and sets for his last Texas Rose Festival pageant. There are few designers of his era who were continuously productive for over seven decades. His death leaves a void in the world of culture, style, and beauty.

A private memorial is planned for a later date. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to Dachshund Lovers of Texas, P.O. Box 820984, Dallas, Texas, 75382-0984. ([dltrescue.org](http://dltrescue.org))

# Tribute Wall



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