

Dorothy Udall and her husband, Rob Udall, formed a typical college town couple: 2 Colorado State University (CSU) professors in very different fields married to each other.

Dorothy, who had graduated from Cornell University and studied at the Cranbrook Academy of Art was an art instructor, and Rob was a professor in CSU's College of Veterinary Medicine.



Dorothy Udall



In 1965 the Udalls left Fort Collins on an adventure which took them off the typical academic path and changed the course of Dorothy's career. They moved to Kenya for Rob Udall to teach at the veterinary school at the University of Nairobi.

In a newspaper interview, Dorothy explained, American wives were not expected to obtain jobs, and thereby displace native workers, so almost all of them became involved in volunteer work. "I wanted to be more than just a visitor, so, like most people I looked around for something in which my own experience could be useful. In 1966, drawing on her art and design background, Dorothy opened a small textile production company, which she dubbed "Maridadi" after the Swahili word meaning "fancy" or "colorful."

Dorothy was helped in her endeavor by local social worker and by the St. John's Community Center, which provided space for her project in a disused brewery in one of Nairobi's poorest neighborhoods. Dorothy started her business producing batik fabrics, using a hand-applied wax-resist method, but quickly switched to silk screen printing, which is a much more straightforward method to teach to workers with no prior experience in fabric dyeing, and much more time efficient.

Maridadi colors and designs arose out of the local environment: the region's traditional arts, the local wildlife, and even typical household objects. The workshop produced men's ties, table mats, pillow covers, yardage, and eventually garments. In just 10 years Maridadi's workforce grew to 80 employees, and the yardage and garments they produced were being sold in upscale shops in Nairobi and exported to the United States and Britain.



Brenda models a full length cotton gown with a standing collar. This pattern is called "Ethiopian border." Left: Hazel and Leslie wear matching outfits in the "Kakoboni" pattern. All the outfits were created by Sil Grant using material designed and printed by Maridadi Fabrics.

*Maridadi is á la mode*

In the post-independence colourful. It was in the small area. It was begun with the for making up into dresses. to 300 yards of fabric a week.

When the Udalls returned to Fort Collins at the end of the 1960s this original Maridadi passed into other hands.

In 1973 Dorothy established Maridadi West: a small textile printing business at the outskirts of town, on the edge of Claymore Lake north and west of Fort Collins.

Dorothy set up shop with Wilma "Tuck" Denney, a Fort Collins resident whom, ironically, she had met while in Nairobi. Denney, who had gone to Kenya with her professor husband once remarked "Dorothy and I had to travel half way around the world to meet."



Dedicated to "custom designing and hand printing of fabrics for interior and fashion use," Maridadi West looked to "the traditions of the past and the natural forms of the land in the American Southwest" for its inspiration.

Here you can see Dorothy and Rob Udall, both wearing Maridadi.

Lucille Lauerman (yet another person from Fort Collins who went to live in Kenya in connection with the university) also sewed garments for Maridadi West on a contract basis.



A really exciting part of the museum's MaridadiWest collection is a group of photographs taken at a fashion show held at CSU in 1975 of garments made with MaridadiWest printed fabrics. Several of the models who participated were important to the company as more than models.

Pat Knight (at center in the short orange dress) was a co-owner along with Hedly Bixby, of Hobbit Tree, a Fort Collins design and clothing construction business, and they created some of the garments.

To the right of Pat is Robert Udall in a very of the moment caftan, that features one of the original Maridadi inspired designs.

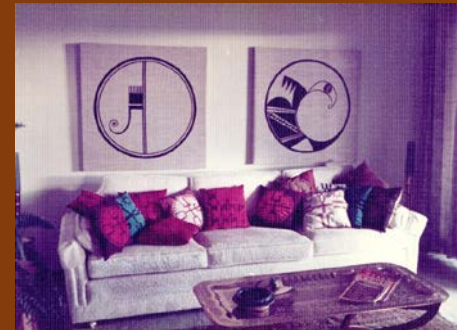


Unfortunately, the museum doesn't have any of these garments, and as far as we know, the Avenir doesn't either. If there is anyone who has or knows of any of them, FCMoD Curator of Collections Linda Moore would love to talk with you!!

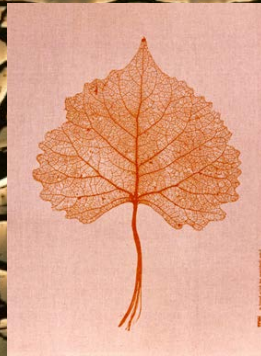


Dorothy also applied her design to interiors, creating an interior for Midland Federal Savings and Loan, in Fort Collins, and also Central Bank for Cooperatives, in Denver.

The framed prints pictured here seem to have been popular around town; people have told us there was a time when they were available at The Cupboard.



Like in the case of FCMoD's May Wilkins Collection, a big part of why the Dorothy Udall collection is such a great one is its depth. Dorothy was a great chronicler of her own creative process: she documented her inspirations in photographs, notes, and even held on to the actual objects that inspired designs. For example, we are pretty much certain that the cottonwood leaf skeleton second from the left is the very leaf that became the screen print at the center in orange.





In a 1970s newspaper article about Maridadi West, Udall explained that, to find her inspirations, she "haunted people's private collections and museums." How fitting, then, that a large collection of materials from Udall's two Maridadis can now be found, perhaps by future artists and designers, at the Fort Collins Museum of Discovery.



Learn more about local history by visiting the Archive at Fort Collins Museum of Discovery, visiting the Poudre River Public Library District, and by checking us out online at the Fort Collins History Connection.