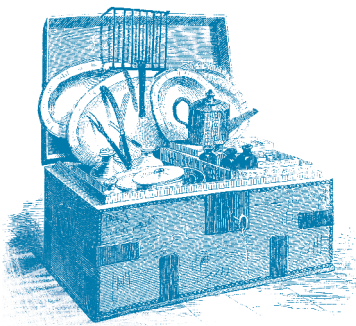


UP FRONT



CURATOR'S CORNER

By Leslie Przybylek, Senior Curator

A Different Space Race

In the spring of 1969, Alcoa encouraged women to “Win the World” by matching six fashion capitals—Paris, London, Acapulco, Istanbul, Madrid, and Rome—with six aluminum-fabric outfits designed by Oscar de la Renta in homage to those cities. Correct matches were eligible to win the grand prize: the whole collection plus a three-week tour to the six destinations. Second prize winners would enjoy trips to Paris and Rome and a set of Oscar de la Renta originals. Today, multiple items associated with this promotion are part of the Alcoa collection at the History Center. The fashions shimmer in surprising colors, including pink, green, gold, and blue. Without labeling, most people would never guess that they were made of aluminum, and in some ways, that was precisely the point.

“Win the World” was sponsored by Alcoa Wrap aluminum foil, a brand that replaced Alcoa’s Wear-Ever foil in 1956. Contestants were required to submit their entry along with a box flap from Alcoa Wrap. Oscar de la Renta’s designs were part of a series of costumes sponsored by the foil brand in the 1960s, including the “Dazzler,” a disposable

RIGHT AND BELOW: “Women of the World” Alcoa Aluminum Newsletter cover and feature, April 1969.

HHC Detre L&A, Aluminum Company of America Collection, MSS 282.



RIGHT: Advertisement for the “Golden Girl” aluminum rain coat Alcoa Wrap promotion, 1968.

HHC Detre L&A, field gathered.



LEFT: Pink and gold aluminum gown by Herbert Sondheim, 1960. This image appeared in a brochure about Alcoa's aluminum foil, “It’s a world of opportunity for you.”

HHC Detre L&A, Aluminum Company of America Collection, MSS 282.B137.F2.

The Austin-American, April 10, 1959.

HHC Detre L&A. #L98.01. Photo by Liz Simpson.



HHC Detre I & A #198 01

UP FRONT

shows, conventions, and grocery stores across the country sponsored by Alcoa Wrap. It appeared on television during the Alcoa Hour in November 1956. Two copies were made to keep up with the demand for appearances. In late 1958, the design was retired, and a new gown was created, this time by American designer Adele Simpson. It likewise made appearances nationwide and traveled until at least 1960, when a third gown, designed by Herbert Sondheim, made its debut.

These efforts set a precedent for what followed. By the mid-1960s, the idea of “metal fashion” was so widespread that other mediums began caricaturing it, including a famous sequence depicting a sheet metal fashion show in the 1966 French satirical film, *Who are you, Polly Magoo?* By 1967, the style of Alcoa’s aluminum fashion had changed, but creations such as the “Golden Girl” raincoat still represented the company’s efforts to broaden consumer understanding about aluminum’s versatility. Tapping an international designer such as Oscar de la Renta for the “Win the World” campaign maintained Alcoa’s tradition of seeking collaboration with top tier designers to reshape ideas about aluminum’s creative potential. While collection records do not indicate who “Won the World” in 1969, the objects that now reside at the Heinz History Center testify to Alcoa’s efforts to recast the perception of aluminum for a modern age. 🌟

¹ See for example, the “Win the World” promotion that appeared in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 30, 1969.

² *Alcoa Aluminum Newsletter*, (November 1968), 2, #MSS 282, Aluminum Company of American Collection, Detre Library & Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center; *The Pittsburgh Press*, November 12, 1967.

³ Alcoa’s rebranding of their foil as “Alcoa Wrap” was part of this process. The label debuted in 1956 with the slogan “we are never content to be second.” See: John Alan Stuckey, *Vertical Integration and Joint Ventures in the Aluminum Industry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 277.

⁴ Dennis Doordan, “Promoting Aluminum: Designers and the American Aluminum Industry,” *Design Issues*, 9:2 (Autumn 1993): 46.

⁵ Stuckey, *Vertical Integration*, 276-277.

⁶ Doordan, “Promoting Aluminum,” 47.

⁷ Excerpt from *Industrial Design* magazine (July 1957) as recounted in the Alcoa Forecast Program scrapbook, #L98.01, Detre Library & Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center; W. L. Russell, “Colored aluminum foil may vie with paint and wallpaper,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, November 14, 1956.

⁸ Laminated aluminum thread was made by sandwiching a strip of colored foil between two sheets of flexible mylar. Patents for laminated thread dated back to the 1930s, when the Dobeckmun Company of Cleveland, Ohio, began experimenting with the idea. Early fabrics were reportedly very rough, and it wasn’t until the 1950s that the technology became truly viable. See: Prindle, Karl E., assignor to the Dobeckmun Company, patent for textile threads, U. S. Patent 2,129,504, filed December 7, 1937 and issued September 6, 1938; Prindle, Karl E. and Lacy, George H., assignors to the Dobeckmun Company, laminated thread, U. S. Patent 2,714,569, filed January 18, 1952 and issued August 2, 1955; and Lacy, George H., assignor to the Dobeckmun Company, patent for laminated thread, U. S. Patent 2,772,994, filed October 18, 1954 and issued December 4, 1956. The Dobeckmun Company’s Lurex brand laminated metallic thread was eventually used to create “Crepe Monte Carlo,” the fabric used in the Alcoa ball gown.

⁹ Advertising for the Alcoa ball gown, as recounted in the Alcoa Forecast Program scrapbook, #L98.01, Detre Library & Archives, Heinz History Center.

¹⁰ Two are still known to exist today, the original dress is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. One of the other two is in the collection of the Bauxite Historical Association and Museum in Bauxite, AR, a former Alcoa company mining town in central Arkansas.

¹¹ “Ball gown features threads of aluminum,” *Daily Independent Journal* (San Rafael, CA), December 30, 1958; “Fabulous gown to be shown at W. Deptford Supermarket,” *Courier Post* (Camden, NJ), May 6, 1959; and “Join the Exciting Fashion Show,” advertisement, *The Times* (Muncie, IN), October 13, 1960. An image of the Herbert Sondheim gown is found in an Alcoa brochure about foil, “It’s a world of opportunity for you,” 1960, #MSS 282, Box 137 Folder 2, Aluminum Company of American Collection, Detre Library & Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center



ABOVE: Three of the “Win the World” grand prize garments designed by Oscar de la Renta.

HHC Collections, 96.68.32, .33, .36. Photo by Liz Simpson.

BELOW: Advertisement for Alcoa Wrap’s “Win the World” fashion match game, 1969, from an Alabama newspaper. Similar ads appeared in *The Pittsburgh Press* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on the previous Sunday.

The Montgomery Advertiser, April 3, 1969.

Win the world!

(with wardrobe to match)

Tour the world's fashion capitals in Oscar de la Renta's most stunning new creations.

Play Alcoa Wrap's Fashion Match Game and you could win an exclusive Oscar de la Renta wardrobe and a fashion world tour to wear it on. Just match each item from this famous designer's collection to the city that inspired it.

Match the dresses with the cities. Correct matches qualify for a drawing which determines the lucky winners. The Grand Prize includes all six of these sensational, jet-age creations plus a three-week tour for two to London, Paris, Rome, Madrid, Istanbul and Acapulco.

More prizes. The three second prizes include five days in Paris followed by five days in Rome for two people, plus the two de la Renta originals inspired by those glamorous cities.

And more prizes. There are no less than one thousand third prizes consisting of an original de la Renta designed belt. So even if you never get around to the capitals of high fashion, you can still wear a shimmering piece of high fashion around you.

Fill out the coupon and mail it today. It could mean the start of a long journey for you.

Rules. 1. Each coupon must be accompanied by an end flap from any box of Alcoa Wrap or with the words Alcoa Wrap on plain paper. 2. Winners will be drawn from entries with correct matches by the independent firm of Marking Inc., Inc. 3. All entries will be final. 4. Employees of Alcoa, its representatives and agencies and their families are ineligible. 5. Void where prohibited by law. 6. Tax liability is winner's responsibility. 7. Grand and second prize winners may claim money substitutes for prizes. Grand prize will be reserved for \$7,500; second prize for \$2,500. 8. Entries must be received by midnight, June 1, 1969.

Entry Coupon—fill out and mail today:

Alcoa Wrap's Fashion Match Game
 Check off P.O. Box 548, Rosemont, Minn. 55068

Fill in the number of each garment in the photo on front of the city which inspired its design.

| | Paris | London | Rome |
|------------|-------|--------|------|
| My name | | | |
| My address | | | |
| City | | | |
| State | | | |

ALCOA WRAP