

Fashion designer Versace slain at Miami Beach-area mansion

Suspected serial killer may be involved

By DAVID ROYSE
Associated Press

MIAMI BEACH, Fla.— Gianni Versace, who dressed celebrities the world over in his glamorous designs, was killed outside his oceanfront villa yesterday by a man who shot him twice in the back of the head at point-blank range.

The FBI was looking into the possibility that suspected serial killer Andrew Cunanan, one of the FBI's 10 most-wanted fugitives, had struck again. The 27-year-old Cunanan, who is suspected in the slayings of four men from Minneapolis to New Jersey, was known to move in gay circles. Versace was homosexual.

Versace, 50, was returning home from the News Cafe on South Beach's Ocean Drive after buying an Italian newspaper when he was gunned down outside the gates of his Mediterranean-style mansion. There was no sign of robbery.

"I do know it is not a random act of violence," Police Chief Richard Barreto said. "I believe that he was targeted."

Officers later cordoned off a five-



Designer Gianni Versace, left, was gunned down yesterday and police are looking for Andrew Cunanan, right, who is suspected in the slayings of four other men.

story municipal parking garage near the scene after a witness saw a man fitting the description of the suspect.

WTVJ-TV in Miami reported that police found clothing under a red Chevrolet pickup truck in the parking garage, and that the truck's vehicle identification number matched that of the vehicle Cunanan was last reported driving. Police believed the clothes belonged to the suspect.

The station also quoted police sources as saying Versace was killed with a .40-caliber handgun, the same caliber weapon used in the murders Cunanan is suspected of committing.

"This guy's a serial killer," said a Miami Beach homicide detective who refused to give his name. "We know who he is."

Police said Cunanan stole a red

pickup truck after his last known slaying, that of a cemetery caretaker in New Jersey. Cunanan also is charged in the May slaying of a Minneapolis architect who had once been his lover, and is the prime suspect in the killings of another former boyfriend in the Minneapolis area and a Chicago businessman.

"We're looking into the possibility" of Cunanan's involvement in Versace's slaying, the FBI's Kevin Rickett said in Minneapolis. "We're looking into anything that is even close."

Along with Giorgio Armani, Versace was considered Italy's leading ready-to-wear designer.

"Gianni Versace, together with a handful of names, symbolizes the success of Italian fashion all over the world," Armani said. "My reaction is one of revolt against such an unnatural and violent death."

Hours after the slaying, a puddle of blood remained on the steps of Versace's three-story home. Hundreds of people gathered across the street, popularly known as "Deco Drive."

Versace's mansion is the only private home on the fashionable stretch of Ocean Drive. The estate, created from two aging Art Deco hotels, faces the Atlantic Ocean. It is surrounded by a high wall, and his Renaissance-style crest adorns the ornate entrances to the estate.

Versace entertained stars such as Madonna and Robert DeNiro and liked to take leisurely walks along South Beach, often alone.