

Next stop! CFW resort wear

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With another Colombo Fashion Week successfully behind him, Ajai Vir Singh is not resting on his laurels. The dynamic CFW founder is now planning for the Resort Wear show to be held this September and with applications now being called for, he talks about his vision for fashion in Sri Lanka



From strength to strength: Fashions from the recently concluded CFW

How did you get into fashion?

Deep down, since childhood, I had this passion that I really wanted to be in fashion or be part of it. Like I always say God is good. He saw my hunger for it and made it bloom in me. I love it! It's instinctive. I look at fashion quite spiritually it's integral to any society, and it's part of the food, clothing and shelter spectrum. Twelve years ago I saw a glimmer of an opportunity and I tried to give it my best shot with integrity and I kept persevering. It's been a great journey.

What was the inspiration for CFW and how did the idea become a reality?

The inspiration was to create a fashion impression or an imprint out of Sri Lanka, and to build a robust fashion design industry, to get all the basics right. Fashion drives us and will always do. We as an organization never want to get distracted by anything else, and there are always a lot of distractions, for example glamour is just a by-product. Everything we do has to contribute towards fashion and its growth.

You are also a designer for Arugam Bay on top of being the President of CFW. How do you manage wearing both hats?

Both the hats are quite different, but complementary—it gives an insider's perspective. You have to seamlessly switch-on one and switch-off the other and vice versa. With that frame of mind you manage to give your best to both.

What events come under the CFW umbrella?

In line with developing fashion in a young market, we have to be innovative to turn constraints into opportunities. That's how we introduced sub-projects or sub-brands, like 'CFW day' at university and college level and, 'Bright Spark' shows to give a firm footing to designers with talent. The themed 'fashion workshops' bring in expertise to issues and topics which are relevant in our industry today and need solutions; 'crafts in fashion' – a programme that was initiated between National Craft Council and Colombo Fashion Week, which is done on two fronts to foster design intervention into key crafts and to bring in expertise from overseas for knowledge sharing. 'Fashion + Food' a growing trend internationally, we thought we should experiment and bring it here. Fashion is not only about clothes but food plays an important role towards anyone looking good internally and externally.

What is the thought process and what influences the themes of CFW each year?

Starting from our laid out plan for development of fashion, we pick up what needs to be done in the current year and in the year ahead. And we very closely follow the impacts and impressions that we can make relevant to Sri Lanka's fashion design industry. We have been among the 'first' on a few occasions to introduce a new concept, like resort wear which we formally introduced as a showcase in 2012.

Who are the key international figures that have attended CFW over

the years?

So far the people that matter in fashion from the region have all been here. From the media point of view the Managing Director of the Condé Nast Group, which owns Vogue, GG, etc. President of Fashion TV Asia and many other important figures related to the industry. From a designer's point of view, from the region we have been lucky to have Rizwan Beyg, Bibi Russell, Rohit Bal, Tarun Tahiliani, Suneet Varma, Satya Paul, Samant Chauhan, Krishna Mehta, James Ferreira, and internationally Agatha Ruiz de la Prada, Geatano Navarra, Orsola from Somewhere, Mevan, Suit Supply, Duyos, Jenjum Gadi etc. I know I am missing more than a few names. We have been well received, and are still on our way to bigger heights by the grace of God.

What are the global fashion shows that CFW is affiliated to and how has the local show developed because of these affiliations?

We have reciprocal tie-ups with Miami Fashion Week, Russia Fashion Week; we have relationships with India, Dubai, Malaysia and Pakistan. We are also in the process of negotiating a few more. These relationships are important from an exposure and experience point of view. Designers such as Darshi (Keerthisena) and Kanchana (KT Brown) have been selected to showcase internationally through these relationships.

Ajai Singh: Big plans for future of CFW

What were the highlights of CFW 2014?

The quality of fashion is getting better. Fashion is subjective too, but still we encourage the power of the idea and being consistent with individual point of view, without getting too subjective.

Future plans for CFW?

We have big plans for CFW in the future. We plan to keep building on each of the fashion foundations we create through CFW to keep getting better so we can soon impact regional fashion in a big way. Next stop is CFW Resort Wear in September!