

Back with offbeat designs, views

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Fashion designer James Ferreira Photo:
K.R. Deepak

When an artiste loses his passion for his art and strays into other pursuits, many give up on him. But when he rediscovers his Muse and resurrects, then the art which breaks forth is simply thrilling. That's in brief the story of James Ferreira, one of India's foremost designers.

Biography

“I came back with cutting and found myself,” says James whose career and chronicles is currently the subject of a biography by film critic, Khalid Mohammed.

They say all is fair in love, war and the fashion industry. So true of the travails faced by James as he began, grew, withdrew and resurfaced in the fashion scene

in a span of 40 years. At 55 life has seasoned out, he says, full of contentment.

A doyen in the field, James was in the city showcasing his menswear line, James Men! At the Kochi International Fashion Week, recently.

After creating a fashion wave in the early eighties by his strikingly, refreshing line, James gave direction to the nascent fashion scene. By the time he was retailing from a few up market stores in Mumbai and designing for Big B and Mithun Chakraborty. James exited the scene quite suddenly.

“I had loads of fun but I had moved away from design.” This disconnect took him into various other vocations like heritage conservation, organic farming, silk weaving and plain day-to-day living. A personal tragedy tore him asunder, something he says still continues to hurt. It was the closeness to earthy elements in farming and preservation that rekindled in him the joy to design. James is back on the scene. After a great show at the Wills Lifestyle Fashion Week in Delhi he brought down his men's line to Kochi.

Lack of business sense

The re-run is proving an exciting one. Matured, mellowed and “having learnt from my mistakes,” James takes all the blame for his long hiatus.

“I am very laid back and have no business sense. The industry has been very kind to me but I am outspoken and hence have only two friends”, he says frankly.

Born into design from a mother who had a keen eye and a fine sense for beauty, he found himself tagging along happily with her to the dressmakers. Always a rebel, James reveals that his father was unhappy with his choice of work. But design was his calling and he was drawn into it as needle to thread. He recalls his mother's tall order to have her house walls painted in different designs by artistes. He remembers the beauty on the walls, for those were early inspirations.

Restless and creative he moved for a short while to intern with London designer Zandra Rhodes. “Fashion is 90 per cent hard work and 10 per cent design” she told the young intern, a lesson he quickly learnt. But James blames himself for not converting his advantageous situation into commercial success. By that time

he had begun to dither and slowly fade away.

Back in business, he finds the present scene to be unfocused. With a dearth of cutters and technicians he believes that fashion designers are going to choke at the hustings, if care is not taken to train craftsmen. He has tied up with Italian company Veryta Foundation to do so.

Glamour has taken over design and there is no professional model scouting, craze for celebrity-hood and success at any cost has hurt the industry, he declares. With celebs walking the ramp, he asks, “Where is the accent on the clothes?”

“It is bad to have a show stopper, because the accent from design shifts,” he says in his nonchalant drawl. Actor Rajnikanth is his model icon for he does not endorse products.

Strong views, frank opinions, that's James and as they say, he may take himself away from fashion but fashion cannot be taken away from James. For, he IS 'fashion'.

Kochi line

James Ferreira had shown in Kochi with Maureen Wadia at Taj Malabar more than a decade ago.

He finds Kerala dressing elegant and classy. He hopes that the inherent architecture of the land will not be altered for commercial reasons, a cause he fights strongly back home in his Portuguese village of Kotachiwadi in Mumbai.

James' collection that he showcased here was a gent's line of simple churidars and kurtas, tie and dye shirts, flowers, brooches and berets. James is full praise for the individuality of the young male models who walked the ramp for him here. He thinks models elsewhere are just clones. Besides the youngsters here floored him with their “principled and ethical approach to the fashion industry,” something he sadly finds missing in the current fashion scene.

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A model at the James Ferreira show
Photo: Special Arrangement



James Ferreira at Kochi with the models Photo: Special Arrangement