



NEW DESIGNERS ON THE BLOCK

BY JAYDEEP GHOSH

HERE ARE THE TOP TEN UPCOMING FASHION DESIGNERS WHO BESIDES HAVING IMMENSE TALENT ARE GIFTED WITH A NOSE FOR BUSINESS THAT SETS THEM APART FROM THEIR CONTEMPORARIES. THEIR DESIGN AESTHETICS AND BUSINESS SENSE PACK A PUNCH THAT PAINTS A BRIGHT PICTURE

The nascent Indian Fashion Industry is growing, getting matured and is ready to take on the world. We often compare the Indian Fashion Industry with the fashion meccas of Paris and Milan but we forget the fact that the fashion industry in Italy and France are almost centuries old while ours is hardly a twenty five-year-old industry. Without much support from venture capitalists, corporate houses and the government, the fashion industry is growing and that's quite an achievement.

Primarily the Indian Fashion Fraternity can be segmented in two phases - the phase before the advent of the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) and the phase post it. The grand-daddies of Indian Fashion Industry got into the trade by default and with the advent of NIFT, designers educated in fashion design started making their mark in the industry.

Today we have too many fashion schools churning out hundreds of fashion designers every year. It has become a very competitive industry but then talent can't be hidden. Here are the Top Ten Upcoming Fashion Designers (in no particular order) who have a bright future. These designers besides having immense talent are doing things the right way and in a planned manner and with the support of venture capitalists they can soar high.

RAHUL MISHRA

1. RAHUL MISHRA passed out from the National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad and with his debut collection he showcased his penchant for Indian textile. Rahul's design sensibilities are minimalistic and his forte seems to be the construction of the garments. For his first fashion show, Rahul Mishra used the South Indian 'Mundu' in creating eclectic garments that were reversible. His passion for Indian textile saw him extensively using the delicate Chanderi in his subsequent collections. Mishra interacts with the weavers and does immense R&D to use traditional Indian textile in crafting out contemporary styles. In his most recent collection, Rahul has deftly used the Jaamdani weave of Bengal and the Baandhani from Bhuj. The esoteric mixing of different fabrics and the juxtaposition of structured shape with fluid drapes make Mishra's garment a treat for the fashionistas.

It is not very often that the President of Chambre de la Syndical (The apex body that organises the Paris Couture Weeks and the Paris Fashion Weeks), Didier Grumbach is liberal with his praises for a designer but when it came to Rahul Mishra, Grumbach was delighted by his work and felt he should show in Paris. He is now nominated from India/ Middle East for the International Woolmark Prize and is amongst the 6 finalists who will gun for the top prize held concurrently with Milan Fashion Week Fall/Winter 2014.



PAYAL PRATAP SINGH

2. PAYAL PRATAP SINGH is a graduate from the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), Delhi. Post graduation, Payal worked at Span International, a major export house and specialised in designing ready-to-wear for women and kids wear for top international labels line Rene Dehry. Being married to ace Indian designer Rajesh Pratap Singh, Payal devoted herself in Rajesh Pratap's backend work like merchandising. It's only couple of years back Payal launched her own label – Payal Pratap and with her very first collection found herself nominated as the finalist for Vogue Fashion Fund, India 2012.

What is intriguing about Payal Pratap's work is the seamless blend of traditional Indian silhouettes with the contemporary western ones. Her first collection at the India Fashion Week was a mix of rich Indian vintage look with that of modern Boho. The peplum jackets paired with a bright sari and churidaars, a Kutch top paired with Lycra jeans are typical examples of such fusion of Indian and western silhouettes. Her design sense is chaotic in a harmonious way; the way she mixes prints with solid colours, embroidery with colour blocking and layers different textiles to create an esoteric look is simply ingenious.

Payal Pratap is also designing accessories and footwear that completes her signature look and with her first flagship store at the Lodi Market in Delhi doing brisk business, she is surging ahead.

ANEETH ARORA

3. ANEETH ARORA'S label PERO sells from more than 50 outlets across the globe and it is not news anymore that Aneeth Arora was the recipient of the 1st Vogue Fashion Fund, India. A PERO look is essentially bohemian, layered and very fluid. Aneeth Arora is one of those designers who loves to work with handloom and woven fabrics and that too with the textiles of India. Cotton is her choicest fabric and she treats the fabric with special enzyme wash to create a signature 'Pero' look that is bit grunge...kinda 'out-of-the-bed' look and very fluid with child-like naïve motifs embroidered sparsely. Aneeth is great at layering and is possibly the only designer to have a vision to layer the Kutchi Blouse over a slim kurta as a jacket.

Not many would know that Aneeth Arora did the costumes for Kate Hudson in Mira Nair's 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist'. Mira discovered Pero during one of her jaunts in Brazil (Yes Pero retails in Brazil too!) and got her to do the costumes for the movie.

Aneeth Arora is very strong with research and passionate about Indian craft and Indian textile. Her latest collection had elements of craft from all across India. She used the pixilated weave of Ikat, the felted tie and dye from Kutch, the Khand blouses of Maharashtra and the Tikalsaris of Karnataka in an enigmatic collection. Aneeth is soon launching her exclusive range of 'Pero' Sarees and the fashion lovers just couldn't wait to lay their hands on them.



RIMZIM DADU

4. RIMZIM DADU, an alumna of Pearl Academy of Fashion launched her label - 'My Village' in 2007 and over the past 7-years Dadu has made 'My Village' a label to reckon with. What impresses me is the way Rimzim Dadu rediscovers her fashion aesthetics season after season. 'My Village' was launched as a label with Indian textiles with an organic feel about it. But since then the label has reinvented itself with nouveau experimental techniques and exceptional surface texturisation.

Her fall-winter 2013 collection was a monochromatic one and used innovative textures using looping, knitting and knotting leather, metal and silicon on fabric. Rimzim transverses over time with her texturisation techniques. For one season it was wire, before that it was soft, sheer organza treated in a way to make it 3D and paper-like, completely eliminating surface ornamentation, while even before that hardware elements like rivets and zipper pull tabs were used as embellishment on contrastingly delicate fabrics like chiffon and georgette. Every season she is doing something different, and wants to take her label one step further. Working with wire is difficult, and so was achieving the shading effect of the Ikat weaves and that's where Dadu's deft texturisation skills bright shine.

'My Village' by Rimzim Dadu retails in India, Japan and Middle East and Dadu is soon planning for her first flagship store.





VINEET BAHL

5.

VINEET BAHL impresses me because whether he is designing an out-and-out western collection or a totally traditional Indian collection, he does with equal finesse. Bahl's Autumn/Winter 2013 collection drew inspiration from 'Awadh' and showcased chikankari and mirror-work on Shararas, Salwars, Kurtas and Saris with a vintage appeal. A year back, his Autumn/Winter 2012 collection was totally western for which, he used global influences like Sardinian and Afghani embroidery. The crocheted lacework, the blotch dot print, the trickle-print on simple shifts & tunics, the fine detailing on the yoke and sleeves of dresses and the intricate threadwork were applaudable. I also loved the modernised application of Kantha work that Vineet Bahl used in the latter part of his collection.

Bahl is one of the few Indian designers who retail from the world's number one fashion portal – Net-a-Porter. Besides his Kantha dresses found place at Anthropologie. Vineet Bahl mixes traditional embroidery with gorgeous chiffon for a contemporary take on casual luxury. His prints and unique embroidery gives a worldly vibe to his clothes that are refreshing and central to his brand - "profundity in simplicity."

Contemporary Shapes and Silhouettes, Clean Construction, Crafty Detailing and Impeccable Finish – the four pillars of fashion are found in Vineet's creations. Now with a flagship store at The DLF Emporio, Vineet is looking at concentrating its retail footprint pan-India.

ALPANA & NEERAJ

6.

ALPANA & NEERAJ label made its runway debut in 2008 at the Wills lifestyle India Fashion Week. Both Alpina and Neeraj graduated from the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) in India. The duo has also showcased in Milan Fashion Week and Miami Fashion Week and has a few international celebrities patronising their label. Carrie Underwood was spotted in Alpina & Neeraj at CMA Awards while Kat Graham wore an Alpina & Neeraj at the premiere of 'The Avengers'.

The Alpina & Neeraj label can be best defined as ultra-modern, conceptual and eclectic. The designer-duo has a forte in impeccable construction of garments and uses unique materials to texturise and embellish them. The Autumn/Winter 2013 collection had a gothic feel which in the designers' words had, "Serpentine Inspiration". Digital prints and the way in which the small pieces of leather had been used to create the feel of reptile scales, was very interesting.

Year back Alpina & Neeraj used woodwork and carpentry in their collection. Defined, structured statement dresses with asymmetrical precision and signature body con minis were juxtaposed with simple separates and softer edged, fan pleated dresses. Contrasting fabrics: faux wood, elasticised yarns, buckles and studding brought textural depth to the garments and made for a striking collection.

Alpina & Neeraj were among the 5 shortlisted designers from India/ Middle East for the Woolmark International Prize 2013. Though they did not make it to the top, the duos structural designs using wool were much appreciated.



SHIVAN & NARRESH

7.

SHIVAN & NARRESH took to designing a very niche segment of womenswear and that is swimwear. Swimwear is not something very easy to design and manufacture as it requires specialised machines and skills and to top it all, swimwear in India doesn't have a sizeable market and sustenance becomes so much more difficult. Still since past seven years Shivan Bhatiya and Narresh Kukreja are going strong with their brand in India as well as US and Europe.

The brand is seen on celebrities like Dita Von Teese, Fergie, Nicki Minaj, Padma Lakshmi to Selita Banks and recently, the brand designed vintage swimsuits for the Hollywood movie Life of Pi by Ang Lee.

What I found to be a strategic move on Shivan & Narresh's part that lately they have expanded the label beyond swimwear to resort wear and sporty dresses. In fact today they design Saris too but maintain the label's core design sensibilities. The destination wedding Sari made out of jersey had pockets to keep sunscreens and cell phones.

The spring/summer 2014 collection of Shivan & Narresh was a mix of monochromes and bright hues in their range of swimwear and resort wear. The way the duo used slashes, loop knotting and dots to detail the garments were truly innovative. The Neoprene Lehanga - new invention for the summer Bride, that is water-proof and micro light in weight was a something unique designed by the duo.



TANVI KEDIA

8.

TANVI KEDIA started her own label in 2007 and her fashion sensibility can be summed up as 'Hippie Deluxe', which essentially means colourful, bohemian and free spirited. Her unique application of much-used digital prints got her huge orders from Anthropologie. Tanvi has christened her breezy silhouettes as 'Kedia Shapes' and is rather assertive in stating that, "No one treats digital prints as I do."

Tanvi is yet another designer who loves to use vintage Indian textiles and traditional Indian craft to texture and embellish her creations. Her eponymous label won her the runner-up award at the Vogue India International Fund in 2013. Tanvi describe her style as 'ethnic-boho' and is currently available across India, Dubai, Kuwait, Japan, London and USA.

Her Autumn/Winter 2013 collection conformed to her 'Hippie Deluxe' look. Intricate digital prints with ethnic aesthetic and colourful embroidery enhanced her colourful collection. Tapestry patterns, sandwiched stripes and mish-mash of geometric prints on dresses, tunics, jackets and skirts showcased Tanvi's mastery in using traditional craft in creating contemporary global styles.



RAAKESH AGARWAL

9.

RAAKESH AGARWAL is a National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) graduate and during post-graduation he interned with Tarun Tahiliani. Raakesh launched his label in 2007 and was soon noticed by the fashionistas for his penchant in designing red-carpet ensembles. Having worked with Tarun Tahiliani, art of drapery came naturally to him and his Grecian draped goddess-gowns found many takers from Bollywood for the award nights.

Luckily Raakesh Agarwal did not limit himself to designing couture because in India the ready-to-wear lines are the bread and butter of the designers. Agarwal proved he was equally good with his pret collections.

However a long period of illness kept Raakesh away from the scene for a long time. The last RTW collection of Raakesh Agarwal I remember seeing had intricate lattice work, some interesting Chevron texturing on dresses and jackets and intricate basket-weave detailing. His couture collection obviously had controlled Bling and Grecian draped gowns with fine tuck and cinge detailing at the waist. All I wish for this bright designer is to be more consistent with showcasing his collections and invest in a store and the future is bright for him.

PIA PAURO

10.

PIA PAURO is just two-years-old in the Indian Fashion Industry but in this short span she has created a mark of a quality resort wear designer, probably only next to the diva of resort fashion – Malini Ramani. Pia Pauro did fashion designing course from the London School of Fashion way back in the year 2000. But then she got married and busy with her restaurateur husband's business. Yet I would say – better late than never Pia!

Pia has been regular at the Lakme Fashion Week in Mumbai and the Wills Lifestyle India Fashion Week in Delhi. Her style reflects her own vagabond lifestyle, which is gypsy like colourful, breezy and embellished with tribal or nomadic materials like feathers and stones.

Her Spring/Summer 2014 collection consists of bikinis, wraps, skirts, dresses, maxi-dresses, palazzos and kaftans in vibrant prints and tribal craftsmanship. Pia Pauro also designs accessories like bags and footwear and the big Jhola bags and tie-up gladiator heels were an absolute hit.

Pia Pauro has a flagship store at the Lodi Market in Delhi and also retails from multi-label boutiques across India. She is also retailing from chic boutiques in Europe and the US and has high net worth individual fashionistas flaunting her designs while holidaying in Monaco, Cannes or Goa.

