

By
RISIDRA MENDIS

He was only 13 when he designed his first wedding saree. But since then Shanith Fernando has come a long way in creating a name for himself as a prominent fashion designer.

Today Fernando is about to launch his own fashion label — ‘Bellesza’ — that is bound to attract all those fashion conscious ladies in Sri Lanka.

Fernando comes from a family of fashion conscious people. Fernando is the youngest in his family of three brothers and four sisters.

In his blood

His elder sister has her own salon, while his younger sister was a model who also took part in television commercials. His father was a superintendent of police and his mother a school teacher at Newstead Girl’s school.

Speaking to *Now*, Fernando said he was greatly influenced by his fashion conscious sisters and this was his main reason for wanting to become a fashion designer some



day. “I could not help but notice the colourful outfits my sisters wore many years ago. My interest in fashion made me use my own imagination and create a design on my own. I hadn’t followed a course in fashion designing when I designed my first wedding saree at the age of 13,” Fernando said.

Wedding attire

Commenting on his designs Fernando said when the bride and groom to be come to him to get their wedding attire designed, the first thing he takes into consideration is their size, complexion and age.

“I then take into consideration the retinue as in how many bridesmaids, bestmen, page boys and flower girls the bride and groom need to have, the time and date of the wedding the venue, the compatibility of the whole retinue and the cultural and social expectations pertaining to the attire

from the bride and groom’s sides,” explained Fernando.

Fernando added that another important factor when designing a wedding outfit is the colour combination. “The colour schemes have

to match the couple’s skin and complexion and enhance their natural beauty. When designing my outfits I always try to blend the east with the west to ensure I’m on par the international fashion standards and trends,” he said.

Counselling

According to Fernando, then comes the counselling aspect. “I talk to the couple and find out what they would like to wear on that important day in their lives and what their parents may want them to wear. There are some couples who want to wear something that they have decided on. This could be a particular design or even a colour that they prefer. Sometimes it is difficult for me to add that aspect into the design that I’m creating, but I always try to accommodate their ideas,” Fernando added.

Fernando designs bridals, casuals, evening and office wear. However what makes this designer a cut above the rest is his commitment in organising a complete bridal solution inclusive of hair and make up, accessories, photographs and cake structures. “As part of my service to my clients I advice them on who they should choose as their photographers and where they should go to order the wedding cake,” he said.

Fernando is a professional who designs for the high class, the elite and the rich. However he has not forgotten the middle class and those of us who cannot pay high prices for designer wear outfits.

New label

Commenting on the launch of his new label ‘Bellesza,’ Fernando said it means beauty in Spanish and Italian. “I hope to launch my own label in December together with my two partners Wasana and Chaminda Baddegama. My designs will be available at the Santastic Fair in December, at the Sri Lanka Exhibition and Convention Centre. Among the designs there will be evening wear, office wear, sarees and accessories at the fair. There will be something for everybody. Money is not a huge factor to me. I cater to the elite and to the simple and ordinary. I hope to launch my own shop in February 2007 in the heart of Colombo. A

Shanith — a cut above the rest!

fashion show is also one of my plans for next year,” Fernando said.

Having studied abroad for many years Fernando is now back in Sri Lanka to give us Sri Lankans a taste of his own designs. “I want to do something for my country and her people,” he says.

Awards

Among his awards are the Gold Medal for Science 2004 and the Academic Achievement Award 2005 from the US University. Fernando enjoys traveling and learning about cultures of foreign countries. “I love Italian cuisine and love to taste different types of cuisine around the world. However my favourite dish will always be the famous Sri Lankan white rice, coconut sambol, sprats and fried chilies,” he said.

Fernando added that as Sri Lankans we should be caring, loving and encourage our brothers and sisters, the soldiers who have devoted their lives for our safe keeping and that of our island. “My deepest gratitude, respect and love is always with them,” he said.

Love and romance

At present Fernando does not have a fiancée. “I would like my fiancée to be level headed and educated person with dedication, determination, stamina and strength to support and encourage me in what I do and also be my best critic. She should be fashion conscious — that’s a must.”

Fernando is a student of Alethea International School and says he is indebted to his directress Kumari Hapugalle, her late father Brigadier Hapugalle, his teachers Mr. Peiris, Mrs. Amarasinghe, Padma Ranasinghe and Sujatha Perera and Mallika Phillips for encouraging and supporting him in his interests in fashion.

