

Pakistani fashion puts its best foot forward

Shahram Haq

Style may be eternal but fashion needs its proponents to be up to date with current trends and developments.

Who sets the trends that will be followed during the upcoming season?

In Pakistan, a few platforms have become the go-to source for all trends relating to fashionable *pret-a-porter*. One such is Pakistan Fashion Design Council's Sunsilk Fashion Week (PSFW). It is a four-day-long extravaganza that endeavours to define and present trends for the upcoming season, focusing specifically on fashion for the regions' long, hot, summer months.

In the past, Pakistan may have been overlooked as a major source of trendy and contemporary fashion, but this is changing fast. Pakistani designers are coming into their own and through international exposure and the power of new media, are becoming a force to be reckoned with on an international level.

The 8th PFDC Sunsilk Fashion Week was held from 18 to 21 April 2015 in Lahore. It featured fashion designers, textile houses and high street brands in three distinct segments, with separate and dedicated showcases by Luxury/Prêt designers on Day 1, early evening high street brand shows followed by late evening Luxury/Prêt shows on Days 2 and 4 with Day 3 dedicated to shows for textile houses only. It is time to take a look at the latest innovations in Pakistani fashion design to identify the latest trends that leading fashion brands are forecasting for the upcoming spring/summer season.



Designer Fahad Hussayn showcased eye-catching headwear and butterfly belts.

Those showcased included luxury/prêt-collections from Fahad Hussayn, Hassan Sheheryar Yasin (HSY), Huma & Amir Adnan, Misha Lakhani, Muse, Nickie Nina, Nida Azwer Atelier, Republic by Omar Farooq, Saira Shakira, Sana Safinaz, Sania Maskatiya, Teena by Hina Butt, Zara Shahjahan and Zonia Anwaar. Debut solo ramp showcases included designers Natasha Kamal and Syeda Amara. The PFDC also expanded their high street show platform to two days of afternoon high street shows featuring Beech Tree, Hassan Riaz, Chinyere, Erum Khan, Generation, House of Arsalan Iqbal, Rayya Gilani and Shirin Hassan.

Day 3 was dedicated to Textile Mill Voile shows and featured Alkaram Studio, Gul Ahmed, Harmony, House of Ittehad, Shubinak and Warda Prints.

The PFDC had also collaborated with leading local financier Bank Alfalah to present the Bank Alfalah Rising Talent showcase, a platform endeavoring to nurture an entire generation of upcoming Pakistani design talent. Additionally, the winner of the Rising Talent Show would be provided a dedicated rack display at the PFDC Lahore multi-label outlet for up to six months after the PSFW to showcase their work. This is a novel initiative which is just what the industry needs to foster new fashion talent.

PFDC Sunsilk Fashion Week 2015 was held at the Lahore Expo Centre, a venue abuzz with excitement as the media took images of renowned personalities on the red carpet or as fashion enthusiasts engaged in vocal discourse about participating fashion brands and their upcoming showcases. While there was a definite aura of festivity at the venue, once the lights dimmed and the opening music began to play, the business of Pakistani fashion was centre stage.

Day 1 was opened by designer Fahad Hussayn who showcased a collection titled Democrats Midsummer 2015. The collection featured five standalone prints from the Fahad Hussayn Print Museum Live Digital Prints in silk and chiffon. The collection was a departure from the designer's usual dark and gothic aesthetic, but demonstrated his growth and maturity. Some aspects of the showcase, such as the exquisite headwear and the butterfly belts were eye-catching and pleasing.

The Bank Alfalah Rising Talent showcase featured the work of four emerging Pakistani designers: Asrar Yaqoob, Hisham Malik, Najia Qazi and Nida Waqar. The designers put up a commendable effort and the mentorship of PFDC senior member Kamiar Rokni has apparently paid off for the designers. The collections were creative, wearable and most importantly, retail-friendly. Only time will tell if the designers have the ability to sustain their work.

Misha Lakhani's "Modern Mughal" collection was eagerly anticipated and was inspired from the juxtaposition of old and new, cartography, versatility, heirloom jewellery, effortless shapes and bare shoulders. Misha had used a variety of fabrics, cuts and embellishments such as jersey, organza, silk voile, silk shantung, stretch satin, slubbed linen and lace with pearls, piping, applique, cutwork and beautiful jewelled belts and gladiator flats. The separates were effortlessly chic and were ideal for evening soirees and red carpet events.



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Natasha Kamal made her ramp debut with the "Le Nouvel Esprit" collection. Inspired by the Art Deco movement of the 1920s the collection drew references to the period's modern styling which combined traditional motifs with industrial age imagery and materials. The collection featured rich colours, bold geometric shapes and lavish ornamentation. Ruffles, which can be challenging to pull off, were a prominent aspect of the designer's showcase, but they worked

well. Renowned media personality Hina Khwaja Bayat walked the ramp as the brand's celebrity showstopper.

The last showcase of the day was by Nickie Nina who showcased a Luxury/Prêt collection titled "Chambeli." Inspired by all the beautiful flowers of the sub-continent and their charming aroma, the collection featured luxe fabrics, cuts and embellishments such as organza, chiffon, silk net, georgettes, French lace, real pearls and 3D floral work based in a colour palette of white, ivory, beige, silvers and black. Key trends highlighted in the collection were short and long shirts, bell bottoms, middies, summer coats, capes, ties, and modified *shalwar* in an amalgamation of eastern and western styles.



Generation was the highlight of the high street segment with a collection titled "I See You".

Day 2 featured the first of the afternoon high street fashion segments, an aspect of fashion which has gained significant prominence in the international fashion arena and is fast becoming an integral part of the Pakistani fashion industry.

While the majority of high street brands played it safe with collections which didn't have the runway impact that was expected, it was easy to see that most collections would definitely sell when they reached the retail space. Generation was the highlight of the high street segment with a collection titled "I See You". In terms of fabric, the collection featured raw finish cottons, denim and doobby juxtaposed with luxe silks, organzas and mesh. The embellishments were very creative and featured thread, mirror, *makaish*, cutwork, applique and a variety of prints.

Designer label Muse opened the evening Luxury/Pret shows with a collection titled "Discipline and Drama." The collection was based on black and white and volatility in gold, silver and slivers of colour. Set in fabrics of organza, dupion and gazar, "Discipline and Drama" featured flared long pants, oversized dresses, pleated skirts, cropped tops layered with coats and metal belts with embellishments of beads, pearls and French sequins. The collection was well-constructed and coherent.

Nida Azwer Atelier is a Fashion Week regular and never fails to impress with her innovative designs and prints. The label's "The Iznik Collection" drew inspiration from Iznik and Persian ceramic patterns and featured a summer aesthetic full of floral and geometric elements. The collection was based in hues of blue and teal with hints of saffron and was embellished with fine silk thread work, crystal and zardozi in



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fabrics such as silks, cotton net and net.



Funky waistcoats and Nehru style coats were the highlight of designer label Zara Shahjahan.

The finale on Day 2 was presented by designer label Zara Shahjahan who marked their fourth participation at PFDC Sunsilk Fashion Week with a collection of Luxury/Prêt titled, “New Vintage.” The women’s wear collection had a fresh colour palette of blues, maroons, salmon pinks and pistachio greens on luxe silks and karandi. One observed desi androgynous silhouettes and separates adorned with jewel embellishments, crystals and semi-precious stones. The collection’s funky waistcoats and Nehru style coats were the highlight.

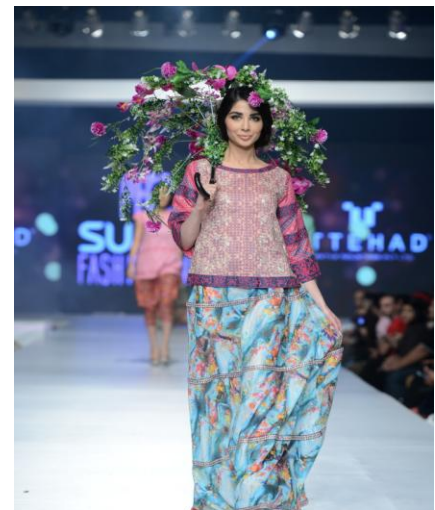
The third day of PFDC Sunsilk Fashion Week 2015 was dedicated to Textile Voile shows, featuring the work of six renowned textile brands. In Pakistan, textile and fashion are synergetic. Fabric for spring/summer and autumn/winter dominates women’s wardrobes. The eruption of designer-textile collaborations that have emerged in Pakistan’s fashion

industry were in fact encouraged, if not borne by these joint platforms. Gul Ahmed opened the evening of Voile shows with the collection, “A Flourishing Journey of Prints” which comprised of a cool and summery assortment of items with diverse cuts and some new and truly unique designs.

Shubinak impressed with a showcase, “Pakistan United” which was inspired by socio-environmental activism and featured pure Pakistani cotton, organic cotton fabrics and recycled cotton bags with Jacquards. The theme was reforestation and had embedded patterns. The design team at Shubinak had creatively incorporated the use of organic resources and social and environmental activism to tremendous effect.

The finale for Day 3 was presented by textile brand the House of Ittehad who showcased a collection titled, “The Sumer Rouge” which had been designed by leading couturier HSY. Inspired by a variety of contemporary cultures with a mix of various ethnicities from all around the globe, the collection featured floral and geometric prints with contemporary and stylish cuts, merged with the combination of conventional and unconventional embellishments. Key trends that were highlighted included floral prints and pastel colours with a little blend of bright in accumulation of exquisite prints.

The final day of PFDC Sunsilk Fashion Week was undoubtedly the best, as many of Pakistan’s A-List celebrities including Fawad Khan, Meesha Shafi and Ayesha



House of Ittehad’s collection was inspired by a variety of contemporary cultures.

Omar raised the glamour quotient of the evening with their attendance. The overall quality of fashion observed on the ramp impressed.



House of Arsalan Iqbal showcased a collection inspired by street art across the world.

The highlight of the afternoon high street fashion shows on the final day was The House of Arsalan Iqbal, who showcased a collection titled “Devolution Chic.” The collection was inspired by street art across the world by various artists and featured unique patterns including calligraphic flourishes and aqua and tangerine bands and circlets. Along with menswear pieces, the collection included in-house footwear and jewellery made in collaboration with pioneering Karachi-based street artist Sanki. The collection was funky and chic and the menswear promises to be successful, retail wise.

Sana Safinaz showcased one of the evening’s best collections. The collection was based in luxurious fabrics including kattan, silks, fine silk organza and duchess satin in a colour palette majorly based in black and white with strong vibrant pop infusions. Key trends that were highlighted were the clean lines, simple cuts and effective embellishments.

Acclaimed menswear brand Republic by Omar Farooq showcased a collection titled “Que Sera, Sera!” which was based in suede, linen, chiffon, cotton, cotton silk and wool silk. The collection built upon the label’s signature aesthetics while providing a new take on contemporary menswear. Acclaimed media personality Fawad Khan walked the ramp as the brand’s celebrity showstopper.

Designer Sania Maskatiya showcased a Luxury/Pret collection titled, “Paristan,” a collection of playful, dream-like pret ensembles that followed the brand’s signature silhouettes, both structured and fluid. Motifs ranged from the sublime to nonsensical, from friendly mice to naughty elves, clocks and teapots, flowering fields and star-filled skies, princesses and ponies. The collection was elegant, trendy and Luxury/Pret done right!

Day 4’s finale was presented by acclaimed couturier HSY who showcased a collection titled, “INK,” inspired by Asia and specifically HSY’s journey to The Land of the Rising Sun. The collection featured the traditional dyeing techniques of Shibori from Nagasaki, Batik from Indonesia and Gara from Sierra Leone infused with mackintosh, saffron, aubergine,



Designer Sania Maskatiya showcased a Luxury/Pret collection of playful, dream-like pret ensembles.

egg shell, rosette, indigo and ochre.

On the concluding day of the event, the Chairperson of the PFDC, Sehyr Saigol, made a special announcement where she shared the Council's plans to establish Pakistan's first craft-based Design District, a multi-purpose specialised facility that would assist in developing and enhancing the arts and crafts industries, an integral part of Pakistan's rich cultural legacy. This was met with appreciation and bodes well for Pakistan's burgeoning arts and crafts industries.

The four-day event presented a feast of fashion and showed the industry's best face to the local and international fashion fraternity. The presence of international buyers at the event ensured that the business of fashion truly was given precedent on occasion and coverage of the event by international media served to highlight Pakistan's blossoming fashion talent to a diverse and far reaching audience.

Did the event achieve its purpose? Yes, and then some! Not only do events such as PFDC Sunsilk

Fashion Week serve to project a softer image of the country abroad, they also promote and develop the nation's fashion industry, a key generator of economic activity.

All eyes are now on the next iteration of PFDC Sunsilk Fashion Week.

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Acclaimed media personality Fawad Khan walked the ramp as celebrity showstopper for menswear brand Republic by Omar Farooq.