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GR

Easy Chic

IA

Volume 13 Issue 4
July 2020

MONEY &
THE MILLENNIAL
*Your Guide To
Save Smart*

The Unstoppable
MILIND
SOMAN
On Fearlessness,
Fitness and
Self-love

• ALL-STAR LINE-UP •

THE OGs

of Fashion, Style & Entertainment



From the EDITOR'S DESK

While we're still trying to find new ground and make sense of the newly established norms of maintaining social and physical distancing, we're constantly throwing back to more carefree times. And here's how we're hoping to inject small cheer – by getting a bit nostalgic with an issue packed with features that will get you in the mood to reminisce.

From the original kings and queens of comedy, who brought their brand of stand-up, roast and reality-based TV shows to your screens long before it exploded on digital, to genre-pioneering designers (read Rohit Bal, Tarun Tahiliani, Abraham & Thakore, Rajesh Pratap Singh, among others) who carved their distinct design aesthetic, and the cool kids with the cool jobs, aka the VJ set, who ushered in an era of desi pop culture, to the firebrand models that ruled the runways and designer look-books – this issue is an ode to the OGs. Fronting the OG brigade is an icon who's

reinvented himself from poster boy to one of the most influential fitness and wellness enthusiasts; our cover for July features a personality that's already toplined many a magazine cover, Milind Soman. Shot just before we went under lockdown, with masks and plenty of hand sanitiser around, we chat with him about staying relevant, exploring his body's responses and self-love.

This issue, we're also talking to you, our readers, about a few raging issues that are taking precedence currently, including looking after your mental health. Plus, we've even got some expert advice on another matter we've got our minds on, keeping tabs on our finances during these uncertain times.

Until next month,

Mehernaaz
Mehernaaz



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GRAZIA | COVER STORY

A mile in his shoes

Milind Soman is in a race against himself, and believes that he must finish strong

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANITA DIXIT
STYLING BY ANITA DIXIT
HAIR BY ANITA DIXIT
MAKEUP BY ANITA DIXIT

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Deepak Lamba

CHIEF COMMUNITY OFFICER & EDITOR
Mehernaaz Dhondy

FASHION DIRECTOR
Pasham Alwani

JUNIOR FASHION EDITOR
Surbhi Shukla

FASHION STYLIST AND WRITER
Ojas Kolvankar

FASHION STYLIST
Garvika Khanna

FEATURES EDITOR
Barry Rodgers

JUNIOR FASHION & FEATURES EDITOR
Tanya Mehta

SENIOR FEATURES WRITER
Radhika Agrawal

SENIOR BEAUTY WRITER
Hena Desai

DIGITAL WRITER
Meghana Ganeshan

SENIOR GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Manjari Loya

ASSISTANT CREATIVE EDITOR
Keegan Crasto

EDITORIAL CO-ORDINATOR
Arwa Poonawala

MARKETING & DIGITAL REVENUE HEAD
Priyadarshi Banerjee

CHIEF MARKETING MANAGER
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Asha Kulkarni

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER
S. Subramaniam

HEAD HUMAN RESOURCES
Meghna Puthawala

HEAD EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING
Aakash Mishra

PUBLISHER
Joji Varghese

BUSINESS DIRECTOR
Sunil Wuthoo, sunil.wuthoo@wmm.co.in

BRAND SOLUTIONS

WEST
GENERAL MANAGER
Annesha Sanyal, annesha.sanyal@wmm.co.in

MUMBAI
Ishika Laul, ishika.laul@wmm.co.in

PUNE
Ekta Dang, ekta.dang@wmm.co.in

AHMEDABAD
Kamal Rajput, kamal.rajput@wmm.co.in

NORTH
VICE PRESIDENT & SALES HEAD - LONG FORM CONTENT
Anjali Rathor, anjali.rathor@wmm.co.in

NOIDA / DELHI
SOUTH
VICE PRESIDENT - SOUTH & BUSINESS HEAD - FEMINA TAMIL
Pravin Menon, pravin.menon@wmm.co.in

EAST
ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT
Alka Kakar, alka.kakar@wmm.co.in

KOLKATA
Bijoy Choudhury, bijoy.choudhury@wmm.co.in

CONTENT STUDIO
VICE PRESIDENT
Vidyut Patra, vidyut.patra@wmm.co.in

SUBSCRIPTIONS
MANAGER - MARKETING
Asha Kulkarni, asha.kulkarni@wmm.co.in

TIMESGROUP (RMD)
ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER
Suparna Sheth, suparna.sheth@timesgroup.com



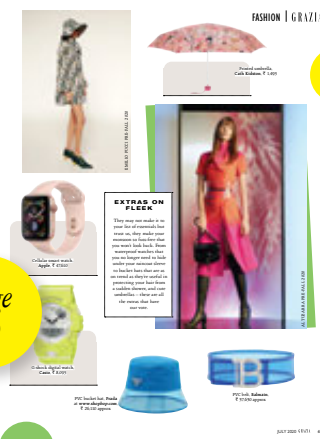
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Daniella Angheben; Photos & Rights Manager Melania Landini

GRAZIA INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

Vice President & Artistic Director Carla Vanni Art Director Giacomo Pasqualini

For further details, please write to graziainternational@mondadori.com

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Europe's No 1 Style Magazine

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MILIND SOMAN is wearing a crew neck T-shirt, Jack & Jones; leather belt, H&M; tailored trousers, Tommy Hilfinger

PHOTOGRAPH
Bikramjit Bose at Feat.Artists

FASHION DIRECTOR
Pasham Alwani

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10 HOT STORIES

EVERYONE'S BEEN TALKING ABOUT

THE NEW NEXT

Home visits, e-appointments and quarantined clothes – this is what the future of retail, in a post Covid-19 era, will look like

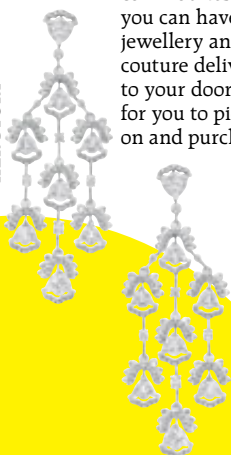
Words PASHAM ALWANI

Doesn't clothes shopping, and simple pleasures like browsing clothes racks, touching fabric and trying things on seem like a distant memory? Now that we've been under house arrest for over 90 days, cabin fever is setting in. The lines between day and night, work and play, downtime and get-up-and-get-to-your-laptop are more blurred than ever – owing to which, the need for distraction has never been greater. That's why, rather than seeing shopping as something frivolous and unnecessary at this time, it can actually be a great way to keep a grip on our previous 'normal' routines or as a source of escapism and light relief from a dystopian reality.

But what *really* is normal? What will shops look like post lockdown? Would we want to risk our health to cop a new dress? Will it be all spaced-out queues and circles drawn on floors, controlled entrances and limits on the number of customers at any one time? One thing is for sure, it won't be the leisurely shopping experience that we have been accustomed to in the past. Several homegrown brands have had to re-evaluate their operations – keeping in mind newly formed consumer habits, the requirement for a seamless shopping experience as well as, and most importantly, keeping health and safety requirements in mind.

Like any other commodities, now you can have fine jewellery and couture delivered to your doorstep for you to pick, try on and purchase

HER STORY



PAYAL KHANDWALA



1

Queuing up for a fitting room has become a thing of the past as brands ensure customer safety and encourage home trials

AM:PM

TRIED AND TESTED

Studies have revealed that Covid-19 can live up to nine days on metal, glass and plastic. Meanwhile, for leather goods and garments, it is advised that they be sanitised and set aside for 24 hours after being tried on again for maximum safety. Fashion houses and jewellery brands in the country are working on strict sanitisation schedules as well as offering home shopping services to ensure that health and safety regulations are met. Mumbai-based designer Payal Khandwala allows you to opt for the brand's recently launched virtual shopping experience, where patrons select clothing via the brand's website, and have the items delivered to their homes so that they don't have to step out. The brand also has a dedicated team that sanitises each product that comes in and goes out.

With fine jewellery brand Her Story, home visits have become the new norm. Post scheduling an appointment, customers are apprised of precautionary measures (stores are disinfected after every walk-in, social distancing, temperature checks and safety gears are ensured at all times; jewels are disinfected after every trial). They also check in on the number of people at the residence who will be present – to ensure social distancing and safety practices. Additionally, prior to and post the home visit, the jewels and trays are thoroughly disinfected.

"We are not allowing trials at our physical stores as of now. Customers are requested to share their measurements at the store, and our team suggests the appropriate size that would fit them. The customers are then asked to carry the merchandise home and try it there. For this process to run smoothly, we have relaxed our exchange policies for the moment. In case a customer doesn't like the fit of a garment, they can return the merchandise at the store. There's an exhaustive sanitisation routine in place, in case something is returned. We isolate the product for at least 48 hours, after which the merchandise is duly cleaned and disinfected at the warehouse, before it's sent back to the store," shares Priyanka Modi of prêt label AM:PM.



Ensuring that bacteria is eliminated, all surfaces, material, and even shopping bags are disinfected

NEW ORDER

Finding innovative means to keep merchandise virus-free is a conundrum most brands have been facing. Gabriella Demetriades of Bollywood-approved brand Deme shares that they are sampling an anti-bacterial fabric that is said to kill 99.9 per cent of surface bacteria, which will roll out this month, ensuring all future garments are made less susceptible to germs. "We have actually installed these machines that disinfect fabric and have also upgraded our website so that check-out is seamless and cash transactions are minimal. Plus, we are focusing more on direct shopping via social media," adds the designer.



DEME

PERSONAL TOUCH

In order to keep up with the high demand and buying power of their audiences, fashion designers and various retailers are now moving operations online as well as offering appointment booking services, as a way to provide a more appealing, personalised shopping experience – and, crucially, to ensure crowd control.

"Revised sanitary regulations and updated safety precautions have been implemented at our retail stores. Ensuring minimum contact is crucial. We have also used our online platform to effectively communicate during the pandemic, and push for a more inclusive and empathetic approach," says Hemant Sagar, co-founder and designer of luxe comfort wear brand Genes by Lecoanet Hemant.

Meanwhile at Good Earth, customers are encouraged to place orders on their web boutique or through WhatsApp messages and phone calls. Their personal shoppers and customer care team are available through the day to assist with product selection, order placement, and the facilitation of contactless payment and home deliveries.

Instead of visiting a physical store, brands are encouraging e-shopping, Zoom calls and are even accepting orders via WhatsApp



SHRIYA SOM

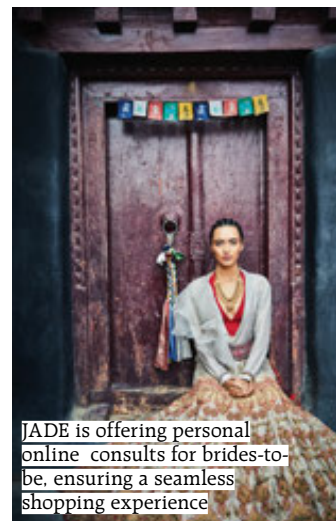


LECOANET HEMANT

"The shopping experience is taking on a different approach. We have moved our client interactions online, through Zoom calls and WhatsApp. Making the e-commerce experience more interactive can also be a way to stand out," shares Shriya Bhupal, of the ultra-feminine label Shriya Som.

Sisters Monica Shah and Karishma Swali (the duo behind the bridal brand JADE) recently launched an online platform that sets out to create a seamless and intimate shopping experience for brides-to-be and their entourage via virtual consultation and e-meetings with the designers themselves. "We're entering a new era of digital living. The beauty of e-commerce is that it breaks geographical barriers and brings you closer to your audience across the country and globe," adds Shah.

Ultimately, shopping – in a conscious and mindful manner – is a gesture of optimism. Buying something for now is a reminder to find joy in the little things, while buying something for your post-Covid wardrobe is a gift to your future self and a reminder that, one day, hopefully we'll go back to the way things were. Till then, we're filling up our shopping carts, Brb. **16**



JADE is offering personal online consults for brides-to-be, ensuring a seamless shopping experience



GOOD EARTH

RESTED BODIES, EXHAUSTED MINDS

The conversation about mental health in India is miles from where it should be

2

The human mind is a complex circuitry of knotted emotions.

Depression emerges from it as a cruel disease that can engulf anybody. Once the symptoms start, they manifest into a downward spiral, leading into a dark abyss; increasing in severity. Everyone feels sad and low at some point, but depression is more than just feeling “blue”.

Depression can affect anyone; however, some are at a greater risk than others. Genetic factors, childhood trauma, brain structure, physical health issues, substance abuse and stress are some of the common causes. The diathesis stress model shows that our predispositions are triggered by stressors. Hence, understanding our stresses and managing them needs to be top priority, especially at a time like this, when Covid-19 has upset normal life, and everything is in limbo.

Statistics tell us that India is one of the most depressed countries in the world. Yet, seeking mental health help in our country is still considered taboo. Our society is stuck between trying to be supportive but lacking empathy, and being judgmental and fearful of those who have any sort of mental disorder. Most people in our country refuse to acknowledge the fact that mental disorders are as bad, if not worse, than physical ailments; we can still function with a broken arm, but how does one function



Narita Sabharwal



help people identify suicidal ideations of a patient could be them talking about killing themselves or dying, finding ways to kill themselves, or talking about having no purpose in life. There is a popular myth that asking people about suicidal ideations pushes them to commit suicide. It, in fact, has been proven to have the exact opposite effect.

Sushant Singh Rajput, an intelligent, versatile and affluent celebrity, who lost his way wading through the deep and dark recesses of his mind, became the

latest victim of this malaise. His struggle with depression and unfortunate death through suicide reminds us that nobody is immune to psychiatric disorders. Social strata, wealth and accomplishments do not define your mental health. It only illuminates the fact that everybody needs support. Alienating people isolates them and breaks their will. Understanding the signs and symptoms and rendering help while the person is struggling is far more valuable. Empathy and regret on social media, in retrospect, remains but a pretense.

If only supporting mental wellbeing through professional help would be as important as supporting physical fitness at gyms, we'd be a changed society. We need to realign our priorities – we're already late. ■

with a broken mind? Mental health is almost paradoxical in our country; when people have a disorder, it's a stigma, and when it takes their life, it's remorseful. Imagine if it was the other way around?

One of the most common outcomes of untreated depression is suicide. People are overwhelmed by the feeling of constantly being sad and in a state of emotional turmoil, which leads them to take extreme steps. Committing suicide is not a fleeting thought, a knee-jerk reaction, or an idea that can be implanted in someone's head. It's a well thought out decision, but, by a disturbed mind.

According to the ICD (International Classification of Diseases), symptoms of depression usually begin with the cognitive triad of hopelessness, helplessness and worthlessness. Other symptoms that could

latest victim of this malaise. His struggle with depression and unfortunate death through suicide reminds us that nobody is immune to psychiatric disorders. Social strata, wealth and accomplishments do not define your mental health. It only illuminates the fact that everybody needs support. Alienating people isolates them and breaks their will. Understanding the signs and symptoms and rendering help while the person is struggling is far more valuable. Empathy and regret on social media, in retrospect, remains but a pretense.

If only supporting mental wellbeing through professional help would be as important as supporting physical fitness at gyms, we'd be a changed society. We need to realign our priorities – we're already late. ■

(Narita Sabharwal is a clinical psychologist)

The Colloquial Caliphate



VARSHA

Label Varsha's designs are the epitome of timeless artisan skill, intricate embroidery patterns and unrivalled quality, all of which are coalesced into every fabric and suit specimen engineered by the brand. Having positioned themselves as an 'every women's brand', they have become the connoisseur of everyday fashion statements embodied by minimal elements and classic brocades. Actress Sonam Bajwa stuns these visuals with the pink salwar suit she adorns. Chic, modish and minimal—the perfect way to capture the true essence of natural beauty.

Weaved with contemporary facets and traditional aspirations, Label Varsha dominates the title of 'The Colloquial Caliphate'. An inception conceived by Sri Gopal in 1993, the legacy of the textile craftsman was then carried forward by his two equally ambitious sons Rahul and Yashraj.

Making their brand more accessible, Label Varsha has created a beautiful online space on their official website (www.labelvarsha.com) to bring the brand closer to its customers. They know how a personalized touch on our clothes can change the way we feel, hence detailed weaving on their specialized cotton checks, linen, and tussar silk promises a charm to every wardrobe. Label Varsha truly symbolises ethnic sincerity articulated through modern poise.



SONAM BAJWA





Tie-up sandals,
Salvatore Ferragamo.
₹ 50,000

Off-shoulder blouse,
Polo Ralph Lauren.
₹ 25,000



Bandhani sweatshirt,
11.11, ₹ 10,900



SACAI

Colour Therapy 3

Ditch your drab lockdown greys and opt for these zappy Pre-Fall hues for an instant pick-me-up

Psychologically proven, each colour of the spectrum hits a different spot in your brain, in turn affecting your moods and feelings dramatically. It doesn't matter if you spend your day indoors or outdoors (with all necessary precautions, of course), there's nothing like wearing a punchy pigment to significantly amp up your mood from *meh* to *yay* in a matter of moments. Whether you're looking for a sense of calm or elation, we've got a shade that speaks your language. We're wearing ours head-to-toe for max impact, but you do you.



Cotton linen shorts,
Aeropostale. ₹ 1,799

GOT THE BLUES

It'll be a while before you can actually plan a beach vacay, so wrapping yourself in shades of sky is the next best thing. The colour wheel's most calming update this Pre-Fall is icy blue, which will make you feel collected, comforted and tranquil. Perfect to calm the jitters from staying indoors.

Ruffle detailed dress,
Michael Kors Collection.
price on request



3.1 PHILLIP LIM



Linen tiered dress,
Eka. ₹ 16,000



One-shoulder blouse,
The Label Life.
₹ 1,940



Bucket hat,
Alberta Ferretti.
₹ 25,220 approx

Flared midi dress,
Alexander McQueen.
price on request



ORANGE YOU GLAD

Take the edge off lockdown by dressing in sunrise hues. The colour is bright and uplifting and makes the wearer look bold, enthusiastic and warm. Be it melon, tangerine or grapefruit, wearing shades of orange is the best dose of vitamin C you will get all week.



THE ATTICO



Button-down blouse,
high-waisted shorts, both
Blazè Milano. ₹ 43,550.
₹ 44,745 respectively



'Padded Cassette'
crossbody bag,
Bottega Veneta.
₹ 1,87,505

GET YOUR GREENS

Whether you prefer pistachio, lime or parrot green, opt for this refreshing hue and bring the outdoors in. It helps relieve stress, brings good luck and health, and is the fastest way to get your energy levels skyrocketing.



Embroidered jacket,
pèro. price on request

FUSION FIX

Color Story by Dee is the perfect style upgrade for your wardrobe

**COLOR
STORY**
by Dee

Launched in 2019, Color Story by Dee is an eclectic fusion clothing line. By bringing contemporary designs into traditional fabrics, the brand is creating a strong identity for itself. What's interesting is that each piece is crafted as a one-off wearable, using premium fabrics, for which customization is also offered. At Color Story, no two capsule collections are the same; each one is independently exquisite. We sat down with the founder of the Dubai-based brand, Deepti Khanna, to find out more.

GRAZIA: What was the inspiration behind Color Story by Dee?

DEEPTI KHANNA: Growing up, I used to wear clothes designed by my mother. It did not take long for me to realise that I wanted to be a part of the world of fashion. My journey took me to London College of Fashion in the UK to study Fashion Merchandising and Communication, and then again to San Francisco for my Certification in Image Consultancy from Sterling Style Academy. Back in Dubai, I worked as a luxury marketer for several luxury brands.

Two years ago, when my daughter was born, I started designing clothes for her. It rekindled my passion to build a brand which would embody the spirit of the women of yesterday, today and the future. That was when Color Story was born – with the idea to explore and infuse my roots with contemporary designs, focusing on details, finesse, affordability and wearability as much as comfort and style.

G: Since each collection is distinctly independent, what is the USP of the brand?

DK: My style is not fast fashion, it's classic staple. The outfits are created using premium fabrics that are sourced from different parts of India, and our future projects will also include collaborations with artisans from across the globe. I see Color Story as a must-have in every woman's wardrobe, much like the LBD.

G: How do you find the balance between being unique and having commercial appeal?

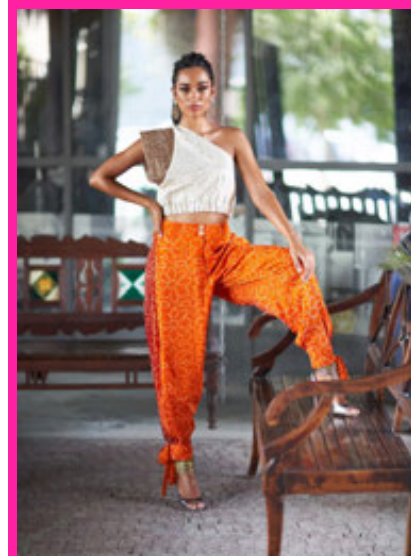
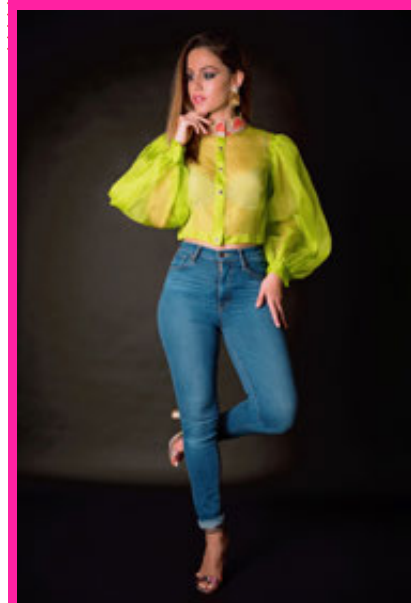
DK: Being unique is the commercial appeal for the brand. I want to create one of a kind capsule collections rather than selling bulk designs. My brand is for the risk-taking eclectic woman, a go-getter who interprets our outfits in her own way.

G: According to you, how can one experiment with their personal style?

DK: Finding and refining personal style can be a struggle. It's important to be able to adapt to a new look while still maintaining a style that is all our own. To figure out your own style and add a dash of experiment to it, one has to Marie Condo one's wardrobe. Let the clothes spark joy, and then start finding inspiration elsewhere – fashion magazines, reliable influencers, social media platforms, style icons etc.

G: One style tip for an impressive WFH outfit?

DK: Dress to impress no one but yourself. Use fashion as a means to uplift your spirit in these constricting times. Colours can help in enhancing your moods, so remember to keep it young and fun.



Instagram: @colorstorybydee

BECOMING MANISH MALHOTRA



Manish Malhotra's 'Empress Story' collection at Amazon India Couture Week 2015



Ranbir Kapoor and Deepika Padukone for 'The Walk of Mijwan' Collection in April 2018

We speak to the designer about his 30-year journey in film and fashion

This year, one of the foremost designers in the country celebrates a career spanning three decades with incontestable relevance in Bollywood and fashion. As millennials, we remember him as the man behind the iconic looks in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, *Dil toh Paagal Hai*, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, and *Om Shanti Om*, to name a few. These are looks we've all emulated and look back on fondly. With numerous achievements and awards to his name, his eponymous label Manish Malhotra completes 15 years this month.

We spoke with the designer as he reflects

on his time in the industry, and how his design philosophy has evolved over time. He says, "When I started out, it was all about movies and costume design and that was all about the character in the script, which was often glamorous. When I started my label, it became my voice and then, I got to create the character." Manish made his costume design debut with *Swarg*, starring Juhi Chawla, in 1990, and five years later, won his first-ever Filmfare award for 'Best Costume Designer' for his work in *Rangeela*, a debut category launched by *Filmfare* in 1995. We asked him if he had



a personal favourite look he worked on in a film, He thoughtfully cited *Rangeela*, *Raja Hindustani*, *Judaai*, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, *Dhadkan*, *Jab We Met*, *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, and *Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani*, before coming to the conclusion that: "The list is endless."

His successes stretch far beyond Indian borders, as he became a member of the Oscar's council in 2018. He has also designed custom-made traditional outfits for Michael Jackson, Will Smith, Hillary Clinton, Naomi Campbell, Kate Moss, Reese Witherspoon, and Kylie Minogue. He didn't have the smoothest beginning when he started out in the fashion industry, as it wasn't the norm for a popular costume designer to foray from film into the fashion industry, "Often, you get put into a box, and for me, that box was one of being a costume designer and stylist. It was the

first time someone from that box stepped out and started a label of their own, which was considered unacceptable for many years. I was targeted and condemned for introducing the concept of a showstopper on a runway, and having movie stars on the front row, and dressing them in my clothes.” However, it’s the norm nowadays. After decades of iconic moments in cinema, dressing celebrities, here and abroad, creating couture for the most lavish weddings, Malhotra believes that the willingness to work hard was his most important takeaway, “You must be willing to work. If you work constantly and seek to learn new things, sometimes, you make mistakes and you learn from them and that opens new doors for you. I question whether I love movies, clothes, the lifestyle and the glamour, or if I just love



India Couture Week 2016



Summer Wedding Edit 2020



working, because when it comes to being on a movie set, a fashion show or catering to a bride, I really enjoy being in the flow of work.” It then seems only natural for his label to branch into new segments – jewellery, home and production, all of which are competitive spaces. How does he manage to stand out from the competition? “By minding my own business. I’m concerned about my work and work family.” With a team of 700 artists, craftsmen and professionals across the country and internationally, Malhotra shuttles between the roles of a designer and a businessman, “It’s very tough”, he emotes, but it’s now a juggle he has gotten in the groove of, but he doesn’t consider himself a businessman still, or even as one of the ‘greats’. “It’s a big word. It feels weird and it sort of connotes that your career is in its twilight years. I have so much more to learn, change and evolve. I still have sleepless nights.”



Shah Rukh Khan and Anushka Sharma for ‘The Walk of Mijwan’ Collection in April 2018



Blender’s Pride Collection February 2020





BREAKING THE NORM

Sanjay Garg on preserving traditional craft heritage

The frequent recounting of my early life is not merely incidental – it is the foundation on which I have built my approach to design and revivalism. I grew up in Mubarikpur, a village in Rajasthan's Alwar district, studied at the Indian Institute of Crafts & Design, in Jaipur, and then went on to study textile design at the National Institute of Fashion Technology, Delhi, after which I took on a small project for the Chanderi Cluster Development Program in 2006, encountering chanderi for the first time, in Chanderi, Madhya Pradesh.

It was during this textile project that I was motivated to think more deeply – why was handloom in such a crisis? Why didn't women want to wear saris anymore, and why was there this great divide between fashion and craft? The challenge was to explore ways in which motifs and colours of chanderi saris could still make sense in today's day and age. However, the skillset and limited use of specific materials proved to be tricky as the loom can only accommodate certain techniques of weaving. It was also challenging to be away from the typical

Chanderi's beautiful, balanced lustre is perfect for India's tropical climate



'fashion cycle' yet also keep collections visually engaging by introducing new colours, motifs and techniques. Innovations and resolutions came in many forms on the loom; major interventions included the addition of vibrant colours and colour blocking on the sari and its borders, which were traditionally only gold. The introduction of motifs, such as birds and mogra, were not part of the traditional design vocabulary, and the layouts of borders were simplified.

It was in Chanderi where I learnt that weaving, handloom and textile is like explaining religion, or the idea of India. There is a factual-based explanation as well as a doctrine-based one, which includes community, societal and emotional reasoning. Factually, handloom is a loom operated by hand. Apart from that, it is about culture, community and craft. For me, the real gurus or teachers are the weavers – no amount of education or academic teaching can match the learning you can acquire on the field, and on the loom.

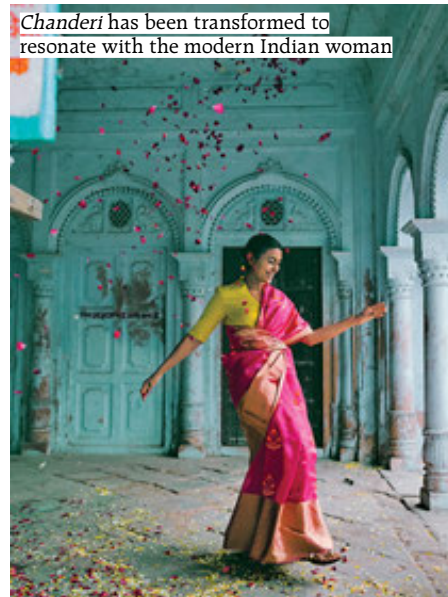
On my most recent visit to Chanderi, I met weavers with whom I have been working with for over a decade. When we first started our working partnership, one weaver occupied a single-room home, now, he has an eight-bedroom house. In another example, a weaver working as a guard, due to the lack of opportunities in the region, has switched back to the loom. One of my weavers has bought a car. All of these examples are testament to the power of the craft. The loom strength in Chanderi has increased from 3,500 to 5,000, and a sphere of influence has been created. Now, consumers speak about Varansi and Chanderi in one breath.

Design is a deeply layered, ongoing process

where you need to think of the future – it's never complete, whether that is through technique, material or colour, we need to continue to diversify our products. We embody tradition in our designs by constantly questioning the context in which it is spoken of, both tradition and modernity are extremely subjective, and it is important to keep evolving and innovating.

Even as the world faces unprecedented times, we must help sustain and secure the ecosystem of our weavers across the country. We need to stand in solidarity alongside the millions of craftsmen that form the second largest workforce in India, after agriculture. We must also support and respect the craft traditions of India, which is essential in contributing to a sustainable and green future. And lastly, we should demand a local and equitable economic growth model for our craft community, one that strengthens the local economy, and safeguards our cultural identity. ■

Chanderi has been transformed to resonate with the modern Indian woman



The weavers are treated as true collaborators



Label
ALERT

6

Build your post-pandemic wardrobe by investing in beautifully constructed eveningwear, and handcrafted footwear



IF YOU LOVE: Structured cocktail dresses.

THEN YOU WILL LOVE: AKHL.

WHO: Delhi-based designer Akhil Nagpal's label came under the spotlight at Lakmé Fashion Week's Gen Next presentation, in 2019. Nagpal holds a graduate degree from Central Saint Martins, and has worked with celebrated designers such as Peter Pilotto, Amit

Aggarwal and Manish Arora before venturing out on his own. The designer, who is committed to creating eco-friendly clothing, aims to employ sustainable techniques on one-of-a-kind haute couture ensembles.

WHY: The adverse impact of the clothing industry on the environment propelled Nagpal to stitch a brand narrative that includes upcycling techniques and sustainable practices. From repurposing surplus fishing yarns for embroideries to developing new age textiles using industrial glass yarn, rayon and silk, the designer has engineered some truly unique innovations. The label introduces a fresh take on eveningwear – contemporary structured silhouettes infused with painstaking surface ornamentation.

PRICE RANGE: ₹ 30,000 - ₹ 1,00,000

WHERE: www.perniaspopupsop.com; www.ogaam.com

WEAR: Consider these well-engineered pieces as trusty investment items for your wardrobe. Be it a virtual date night in lockdown or a gala post quarantine, these statement dresses will help you channel modern and responsible glamour. Pair them with naked sandals and smokey eye make-up to finish the look.

IF YOU LOVE: Handcrafted footwear.

THEN YOU WILL LOVE: The Episode.

WHO: After successfully running a clothing label, called Sairah, Roopsi Suri launched this quirky footwear brand in 2019. What started out as a passion project for Roopsi, while designing the perfect footwear for her wedding, soon turned into a business. The brand encourages customisation, not just for weddings but also for everyday use, according to one's requirements.

WHY: Suri gathers inspiration from her travels across the world to design playful and kitsch-y heels and flats. The brand is known for its 3D embellishments – think sequins and embroideries, beadwork, encrusted coloured stones, tassels and pearls. Each pair is handcrafted incorporating a cushioned base and a breathable fit, keeping in mind the comfort of its customers. It's safe to say that these bespoke pairs of wearable art will bring out your creative best.

PRICE RANGE: ₹ 2,500 - ₹ 5,500

WHERE: www.ensembleindia.com

WEAR: Slip into an eclectic pair if you want to add a touch of whimsy to your style. Add them to your post-pandemic wish list as these pretty slip-ons are ideal for a brunch date with your BFFs, or maybe a beach holiday, someday.



7



Paul Mescal



Paul Mescal and Daisy Edgar-Jones in *Normal People*

THE THIRST IS REAL

Lockdown has us craving intimacy of our own, even if it is on a mobile screen

Fame is a tricky beast to tackle. It is coveted by those who do not have it, and leaves those who have it quite miserable, judging by the celebrities who have gotten more than their fair share of it. For Paul Mescal and Daisy Edgar-Jones, the stars of the hugely popular show *Normal People*, fame has come at a rather opportune time. While much of the world is in lockdown, they have emerged as wide-eyed celebrities in their own right. Mescal, especially, has become the object of

our collective desires, and this cannot only be attributed to his boyish charm, that coy smile or those short shorts he's been sporting in those innumerable pap pictures that document his now-famous errand runs in London. He's also symbolic of the frailty of modern-day romance. In his turn as the handsome and insecure Connell Waldron, Mescal embodies the kind of brooding intensity that's meant to speed up your heart rate. And his unbeatable first-love chemistry with Edgar-Jones's Marianne ("It's

not like this with other people," Marianne reminds him in the series) takes us on a rollercoaster ride of emotion, which has only been exacerbated by the current lockdown, as they come together, and fall apart, and come together again.

While the show is loaded with NSFW sex scenes, some of its most intimate moments, however, involve no physical contact. "It's almost like they take you on a journey with them. I think their volatile relationship hits close to home because I

was in a similar situation with my ex-boyfriend. Although we dated on and off, we couldn't muster up the courage to be truly honest about our feelings. The show is so relatable because it forces you to examine your own notions of romance, and the current nature of relationships," says Kimberly Thomas, a Hyderabad-based pastry chef, who's now reading the novel, on which the show is based, by Sally Rooney. In fact, in one scene, Marianne watches Connell fall asleep through her laptop, and is there for him when he wakes up in the morning. It's a moment that resonates with the loneliness brought on by the pandemic, as many relationships must weather the never-easy long-distance conundrum.



Maxi Iglesias



Diana Gómez and Maxi Iglesias in *Valeria*

SPANISH FLAVOUR

Valeria, the Spanish language Netflix rom-com, is another arbitrary by-the-numbers slice-of-life drama that draws you in and makes you privy to the sex lives of its female leads. Once you start watching the show, it is hard not to notice the sexual tension between the lead (played by Diana Gómez) and her sexy suitor, Victor (played by Spanish model and actor Maxi Iglesias). The off-the-charts magnetism is undeniable even as Iglesias' character attempts to seduce the series' titular heroine, who's a married author. As a single person quarantined at home amid the Covid-19 pandemic – and therefore away from any usual means of

hooking up – *Valeria* couldn't have come at a more opportune time. The series is not only a pretty accurate reflection of the mechanics of sex, but also the sharpness of desire that actually makes sex so exciting in the first place. Not for one second do you doubt the hunger that *Valeria*'s characters feel for their sexual partners, and considering most of us are desperate for some form of intimacy of our own, the show comes close to supplying you with the thrills you desire – without the daunting trip outside. However, counselling psychologist Divya Dureja warns that if watching couples in joy, on screen, leaves

us with a sense of jealousy or puts us in a low mood, we need to ascertain: Why is it really so? "How often have we engaged in intimacy and hook-ups to activate our pleasure centre that somewhere it became habitual and not truly stable? At times, to make up for our dissatisfaction in certain areas of our life, we unconsciously give more weightage to our love life, hoping that the joy we will get from it will balance or overpower the rest."

If you were to peruse your Netflix home page, it's likely you've seen *365 Days* on the trending list in India. People, including a friend of mind who

recommended I watch it, are going gaga over the literal romp, which was released in early June, whether they're clutching their pearls in disgust or fanning themselves in rapturous delight. And if you fall into the latter, I'm here to rain on your parade and talk about how problematic this film is. But then again, the popularity of the film also underlines a deeper malaise: This generation's fascination with cheap thrills. Dubbed a 'Polish Fifty Shades of Grey', the movie follows Laura 'Low-ra' Biel (Anna Maria Sieklucka), a sales director at a luxury hotel in Poland, who is kidnapped by Sicilian Mafia leader and current social media heartthrob Michele Morrone (who plays Massimo Torricelli). Kidnapped? That would be a gross misrepresentation of a situation that involves drugging her and holding her captive in some random villa, because apparently it makes for sexy cinema. I suppose everyone wants a Massimo of their own as, clearly with a raging case of Stockholm Syndrome, Laura falls in love with him. This is the cue for all the raunchy scenes: Sex on a boat, on a bench, against the window... you name it.

And while this is not a petition to get you to stop watching what you enjoy when it comes to cinematic viewing, if this counts as romance these days, then we're doing romance wrong. **L**



Michele Morrone

ALL GROWN UP

Millennials are facing an unprecedented economic crisis, and some have found that they are not adequately prepared for it

8



As we take tentative steps to ‘normal life’, I realise I have a ton of work to do. There’s been a fair bit of enjoying good food and a lot less exercise and self-care. I’m not going to blame myself; instead, I’m making allowances for living through a rather difficult time in human history. More than dealing with the extra rolls on my tum though, I’m currently experiencing Zoom burnout. During one of my many weekly virtual hangouts with friends on the app, I was embarrassingly close to telling the crew: “I’m too tired to continue this.” But, a sudden turn in the conversation dissuaded me from delivering that sting. It pivoted from “I can’t wait to hit the club once this is done” to “I don’t think I have enough money saved to tide me over for the next three months.” It suddenly hit all of us (thankfully, there was alcohol to numb the blow) that financial well-being was something we’d never really thought about. What’s becoming glaringly apparent now is that as we approach some sense of normalcy, a huge number of millennial and Gen Z folk will be looking for guidance on how to best manage their finances to pad up prudently for a future that hinges on hope and a vaccine.

LOOKING THROUGH

These extraordinary times have turned

the spotlight within, forcing many of us to introspect on aspects of our lives that we perhaps previously didn’t have the time, or headspace, to focus on. For Kolkata-based Sourav Bhattacharjee, founder of Room-Com – a start-up that integrates experience centres, design partners, logistics, production, and financing, to make interior design easy and affordable for homeowners, 2020 started on a promising note. “I was excited to start my own venture. I’m a corporate guy, and so the idea of investing my savings in kick-starting my passion project seemed exciting. And then, corona hit. It’s been difficult trying to stay positive during this time, but I believe there is a silver lining,” he says. For Bhattacharjee, the statistic that prompted him to start his venture was this, he says: “On an average, a 23-35-year-old spends more than 5,000 hours in their room, annually. I thought to myself: Why not make it personal? Ironically, my target audience is now navigating the new normal of working from home.” So then, will his fledgling venture survive the pandemic, and does he have enough saved to see him through? “I may not be an active investor, but I’d like to pride myself on being a dependable employer. I’m not going to lie; I’m increasingly concerned about the worsening global market and my financial prospects. So, I have been on my toes,

constantly finding ways to make this business work despite the lockdown,” says Bhattacharjee.

LOOKING WITHIN

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, 28-year-old Jane Kiro, an NIFT alumnus and Jharkhand native, was criticised by her friends for crowding cafes on the daily and sensing an opportunity for cheap vacations. Not anymore. The lockdown has prompted Kiro, who was in the initial phase of starting her own fashion label before coronavirus hit, to re-evaluate her saving habits. “I have never been frugal. I would spend a considerable portion of my income on takeaway, so I don’t have a comfortable financial safety net,” says Kiro, who works with a few NGOs in Mumbai. “Most of us are going to come out of this pandemic more scared and prudent than ever. We will now not check our bank balances to figure out if we can afford that designer outfit, or that gorgeous Airbnb rental, but to see whether we will be able to pay the rent for the next few months. I think I will open a recurring savings account once there’s a steady cash flow again,” she says.

LOOKING FORWARD

Perhaps no industry has been hit quickly – or as widely – by the rapid spread of Covid-19 as entertainment. The film and television industry

have been navigating a particularly tumultuous time as both the production and the consumption of its output require many people to huddle together in small spaces. "One need only look at the end credits for most major films or television soaps and reality series to understand just how many people are involved in producing a single two-hour film or a TV series," says actor and social media influencer, Mohit Hiranandani,

who adds that he was forced to confront his new reality quickly after only a few days on set of the TV soap he was shooting for before lockdown. "Thankfully, I had enough saved to ensure I lived comfortably for a few months. But I did slash my spending a bit, and even planned to talk with my landlord for a rent reduction," he says. And while he will start shooting soon, he believes that the hustle-and-work-till-

you-drop culture that our generation has adopted may not be a sustainable option. "I can't seem to wrap my brain around mutual funds and SIPs, but I'm open to financial advice beyond just maintaining a savings account. I am currently actively looking for investment vehicles that can provide greater returns," he says.

The next few months will reveal if all this will change.

SWIPERS TO SAVERS

Here's the skinny on how to plan your investments wisely in a post Covid-19 world



Millennials are a DIY generation. They love doing things by themselves: Learning, travelling, acquiring knowledge, and even making mistakes, in their own way. As the world changes, the goals of each generation have changed as well. Millennials have a new set of goals that they wish to achieve, apart from the goals the preceding generations aimed for.

NEW DIRECTION

The old methods of financial planning no longer work. A financial advisor might tell a millennial, "Come son, let's plan for your retirement." They may respond, "Uncle, forget about 25 years, YOLO. I want to plan a trip to Spain next year." This is primarily why millennials prefer ro-bo advisors to financial advisors, because a machine does not talk back, and they are used to staring at screens for everything, from ordering food to dating.

An important factor to keep in mind here is that none of this is wrong, it's just different. Millennials need to work in a different way with respect to their financial planning as compared to the previous generations, to keep in touch with changing attitudes and evolving times. People constantly eulogise about data being the new oil, but it would be of very little use if that oil is not refined. The challenge is to focus on the information that is relevant. The world is changing even more rapidly now due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, and following a few basic steps of financial planning are important.

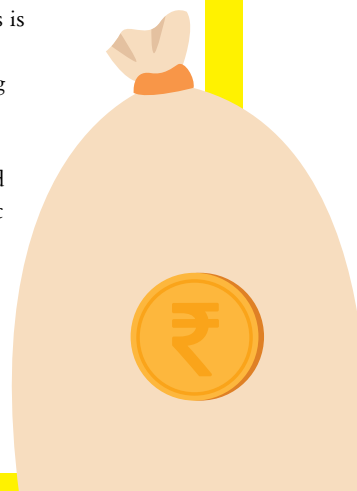
- Do not think of investing as an option. Start small, but start you must.
- A mutual fund SIP is the best way to start

investing in equity. This allows you to enter the market for an amount that is as low as ₹ 1,000 per month.

- Along with taking care of your investments, protection is an important part of financial planning, too. Do not confuse insurance with investment. If you have dependents, adequate health and life cover is essential, opt for a minimum of rupees one crore as a life insurance term cover, and a health insurance cover of ₹ 5 lakhs.
- Be mindful of maxing out your credit card. It's important to remember that EMIs are an illusion, making you believe that you can afford anything. With no signs of the coronavirus crisis abating, freelance work is expected to spike in the popularity stakes. As we move towards a gig economy (the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelancing), which is something millennials are more comfortable with, it'll become imperative to tweak financial planning accordingly. In this case, expenses will remain constant, while income will not. This is a factor that needs to be taken into account while preparing a financial plan and deciding your asset allocation.

The most important part of financial planning is understanding where to start and where to stop. You need to decide on a magic number that you believe will make you financially free and allow you to live life on your terms. Once you zero in on this amount, the rest of your financial planning will become easier. **U**

(Rishabh Parakh is a financial expert and founder of Money Plant Consultancy)





IN THE SPOTLIGHT

These digital platforms are giving artisans agency over their craft

Like most millennials, if you spend a lot of time scrolling through Instagram, chances are that you must have already stumbled upon young fashion entrepreneur Juri Das' account, @juri_weaves. The designer's feed is populated with artistically shot images of handlooms and textiles that resemble close to any other high-end sustainable brand.

The 24-year-old entrepreneur hails from Jharpara village in Assam, and is one of the brightest students of the design and business education programme conducted by Tata Trust's craft-based livelihood initiative, Antaran, despite being a college dropout. Over the last couple of years, with the help of Antaran, Das has not only become a skilled master weaver but has also learnt entrepreneurial skills such as brand marketing and communication, and how to use new technology. She has employed 15 weavers from her village and pays them fairly. Responding to the nationwide lockdown, she pivoted her digital presence to amplify sales. Within three months of launching her Instagram account, she has already started receiving orders.

"In the past few months, I have realised the impact of social media. A good picture can take my business a long way. Ever since I started focusing on the quality of my images, retailers and other customers have started taking notice of my products. I make sure the pictures are clicked in good lighting and against a nice backdrop so that the colours and motifs are clearly visible. Further, I have started documenting not just the finished product but also the process that goes into creating it. This keeps my buyers engaged," adds Juri.



Assamese artisan
Juri Das

Like Juri, Antaran also supports many weavers from handloom clusters across the states of Assam, Nagaland, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. Under this initiative, Tata Trust has established physical incubation and design centres in these regions and has also created a comprehensive digital guide for the weavers in video format under Antaran Knowledge Centre. The holistic programme comprises training relating to design techniques; right from the basics of understanding a colour palette to the nitty-gritties of production and scale. There are even modules on branding, sales and marketing.

In the same vein, designer Pranay Baidya launched Tant, an initiative that supports weaving communities in the Santipur, Phulia, Nadia and Dhanikhali districts of West Bengal. The global health crisis, subsequent nationwide lockdown and the recent cyclone Amphan have adversely affected the lives of weavers in the region.

"March and April are the busiest months for these weavers as they prepare for the Chaitra sale (the annual shopping festival ahead of the Bengali New Year). Due to the pandemic, all the orders came to a grinding halt. The need of the hour is to mobilise retail for existing stock and provide e-commerce to boost business and revive the endangered communities", adds Pranay.

Since then, he has been hosting regular workshops with the weavers over video conferencing, offering them creative direction and textile design expertise to develop a collection of contemporary tant saris and textiles. For this, the designer has adopted a knowledge-sharing approach; he mentors 50 master weavers who further train the

groups of artisans working with them. The saris are photographed by the weavers on their own, which Baidya shares with his extensive network of buyers. The designer has been able to successfully pre-book orders with leading multi-designer stores and e-commerce portals. The entire revenue from the sales will be redirected to the weavers.

Meanwhile, Sreejith Jeevan from Rouka wants to draw attention to the weavers from Kerala. Jeevan has been working closely with the Chendamangalam Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society No 648 and a not-for-profit, Care4Chendamangalam, to mentor artisans in producing contemporary saris for diverse consumers. Many artisans who have access to looms in their homes have been weaving saris even during lockdown. The designer is selling them on Rouka's website and redirects funds towards the weaver community. Further, following social distancing norms, the collective has released a DIY campaign shot by artisans wearing their own creations. According to Jeevan, the imagery gives visibility to the artisans, showcases their working conditions, and appeals to customers for support via digital media.

It is interesting that artisans, who have traditionally been resistant to change and have depended on designers, corporations and middle men to sell their products, not allowing them an opportunity to interact with their customers, now have agency to price their own products and tell their own stories. With access to digital media platforms, financial aid from stakeholders and knowledge-sharing tools, artisans working at the grassroots may soon become self-reliant. ■

10 HOT STORIES

Cotton bra,
Clovia, ₹ 399



Cotton non-wired bra,
Wacoal, ₹ 3,499



Ribbed cotton bra,
Zivame, ₹ 449



Do like Kendall Jenner
and wear a sheer
button-down over
your comfiest bralette



Lace bralet,
H&M, ₹ 1,999



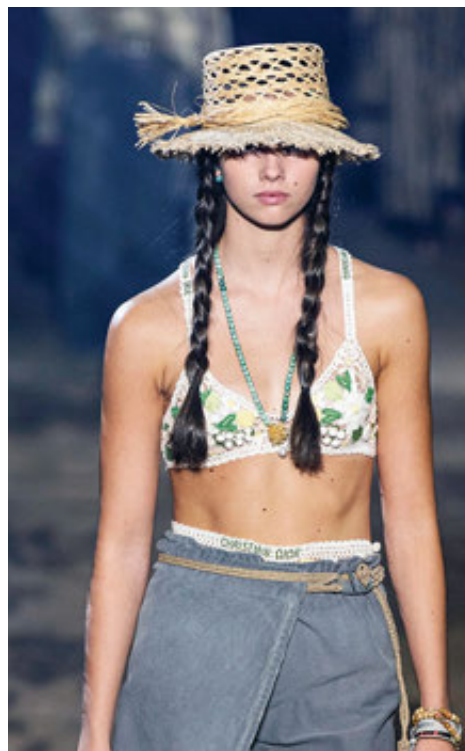
Lace bralet,
Marks & Spencer,
₹ 3,999



Second skin

10

Whether you prefer a barely-there lace bralette or a classic T-shirt softie

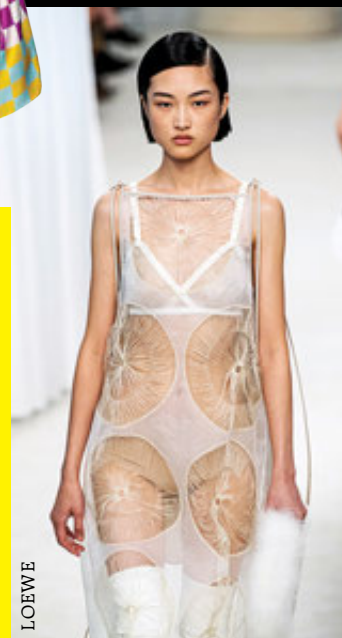


Bras, through history, have been known to be notoriously uncomfortable. We've been at home under lockdown for far too long to voluntarily deal with the discomfort for even a second – sometimes, even the thought of underwire can be nightmare-inducing. Why did we ever put ourselves through that? Must our chests be constrained again? While anything form-fitting might seem unnecessary these days, not all bras were made to leave you feeling constricted. Comfort is undeniably the key to a good outdoor outfit situation. Your hunt for well designed and liberating suggestions for all kinds of cup sizes and style preferences ends here. They are also cute enough to let show. That is, of course, if you plan on wearing a bra again.

LANVIN



LOEWE



Non-wired bra,
Calvin Klein, ₹ 3,699



Photograph IMAXTREE, Junior Fashion Editor SURBHI SHUKLA

The OGs

From the OG kings and queens of comedy, who brought their brand of stand-up, roast and reality-based TV shows to your screens long before it exploded on digital, to genre-pioneering designers who carved their distinct design aesthetic, and the cool kids with the cool jobs, aka the VJ set, who ushered in an era of desi pop culture – we hit rewind with a nostalgic trip down memory lane.



THE PERFECT SHADE OF GREY

Cop our cover star's salt 'n pepper look with Schwarzkopf Professional's GOODBYE YELLOW

If there's one haircare tip we can take from our cover star, it's this: Accepting your greys means accepting yourself in all your glory. When it comes to hair, there's only one acceptable shade of grey – grey. So why is it that George Clooney's salt n' pepper look remains flawless, while your greys often adopt a dull, yellowish tinge? The naturally dark colour of Indian hair make your silvery locks prone to dullness. If your silver crown is looking a little yellow, worry not. We've got some good news for you. Schwarzkopf Professional's new shampoo, GOODBYE YELLOW promises to restore the shine and colour of your greys in a matter of minutes.

HOW IT WORKS

This anti-yellow, SLS/SLES* sulfates free shampoo works to neutralise the underlying warm tones of dark hair. The secret to this magical concoction lies in its purple and blue direct dyes, which work together to keep the yellows at bay, while also gently cleansing your locks. That's not all. With a pH level of 4.5, you can rest assured that the effects will be long-lasting and worthwhile.

HOW TO USE

GOODBYE YELLOW can be easily incorporated in your haircare routine. Apply it to your hair and leave it in for about five minutes. For maximum tonal deposit, you can use it every day, and if your mane only requires tonal maintenance, it is recommended you use this shampoo twice a week. You can also turn to GOODBYE YELLOW's in-salon services at a Schwarzkopf Professional salon for an even more polished effect. If you want to cop our cover star's look, we suggest going for their #DADDYCOOL service – which is designed to give you a refreshing haircut paired with an anti-yellow wash. So, what are you waiting for? It's time to go grey, or go home.



AVAILABLE AT ALL LEADING SALONS
#MYSCHWARZKOPF
f SCHWARZKOPFPROFESSIONALINDIA
i SCHWARZKOPFIN

A mile in his shoes

Milind Soman is in a race against himself, and believes that he must finish strong

Photographs **BIKRAMJIT BOSE/FEAT.CAST**

Fashion Director **PASHAM ALWANI**

Words **BARRY RODGERS**

Button-down shirt, **Michael Kors Collection**, price on request;
Trucker jacket, straight fit jeans, both, **Levis**,
₹ 4,599 and ₹ 3,299 respectively; wrist bands, worn throughout,
Milind's own



This page: 'Smooth Talker' T-shirt, **Bhaane**, ₹ 3,000; Linen blend jacket and joggers, both **NM Studio**, ₹ 14,000; 'Arnold & Son Eight-Day Royal Navy' watch, **Arnold & Son** at **Rose The Watch Bar**, price on request

Facing page: Denim jacket, **Korra Jeans**, ₹ 6,990



When I started working on Milind Soman's profile (which was earlier intended for *Grazia's* anniversary issue in April), I decided to approach it with a 'say yes to everything, try to be cool'

attitude, with the idea that maybe I'd capture something real about India's first-ever male supermodel. And he didn't disappoint. When he arrived at the cover shoot (a couple of days before the government-mandated lockdown was imposed, in March), it was evident that he was revelling in the flow of his cool energy. He acknowledged everyone in the room, obliged a few members of the crew with a selfie (only after they agreed to do push-ups), and engaged in conversation with the photographer for the day, Bikramjit, with a wry smile permanently plastered on his face. Our interview started with a handshake, transitioned to a shoulder squeeze, and then eased into a rather interesting conversation about life, fitness, and passion.

"The supermodel craze was a media construct, and the title quickly became the model equivalent of a superstar.

Internationally, you had the likes of Cindy Crawford and Christy Turlington. Correspondingly, fashion was coming of age in India too, and I got to ride the wave. Suddenly, models were more than just leggy clothes horses – they had a voice, were written about in gossip columns, partied in the trendiest nightspots, landed movie roles and earned themselves extra money outside of modelling," he says. Apart from being disarmingly charming, Soman is also refreshingly candid.

"I come from an academic family, so modelling wasn't ever part of the plan. I was pursuing an engineering degree at the time when, on a lark, I decided to give modelling a shot. My first assignment fetched me ₹ 50,000 in 1989, which was a lot of money. Some months later, I was approached by Tarun Tahiliani and Rohit Khosla to model for the store Ensemble. I grabbed at the opportunity and the rest, as they say, is history. It was not easy at first. No one gives you a book on

how to do it. You sort of find your way, and that for me is the best way to learn."

As one of the country's best swimmers of the 1980s, Soman had put in the hard work to represent India at the Asian Games, and could have possibly represented India at the Olympics too, but saw it all go up in smoke when he decided not to grease the wheels that moved the system in the India of the 1980s. "Fitness is a big part of my life. My understanding of who I am, what I am, and who I want to be stems from discipline. Since I was 13 or 14, I've devoted 99 per cent of my energy to it," he says.



MADE IN INDIA

The year 1995 was a watershed one for Soman. It was when the video for Alisha Chinai's song *Made in India* catapulted him to cult status. He reminds me, however, that he was on screen for a mere 53 seconds. "I didn't notice the video at all; it was just another day on the job for me. It's only in hindsight that I've come to realise how big the video became," he says, moving on to the more significant memory of losing his father that same year. "My dad's death left me with mixed feelings. We did »

"If you are still learning from your life experiences,
people will be interested in your story"



Custom-fit, made to order denim jacket and selvedged jeans, both **Korra Jeans**,
₹ 6,900 and ₹ 2,900 respectively



Button-down shirt,
Michael Kors Collection,
price on request; Trucker
jacket, **Levis**, ₹ 4,599

not share a particularly close bond, which is sad when you come to think of it, because he cared deeply for me. When he had moved out of our home five years before he died, I remember feeling a sense of relief. I made peace with that chapter in my life; fortunately for me, I was able to make my peace with it sooner rather than late,” he says, adding that his 81-year-old mother, Usha, has been his biggest motivator and cheerleader over the years. “She started trekking about two decades ago and still continues to scale some of the highest mountain ranges across the world. My mom has never been afraid to put in the hard work. She does what she wants and never complains. I am astounded by her mental fortitude. She is a prime example of why it’s important to normalise fitness at any age,” he says. Soman is currently quarantining with his mother and wife, Ankita Konwar. A scroll through his Instagram account throws up images rooted in things he holds dear: Locally sourced fruits and vegetables, fitness, and family.

It was also the year Soman quit modelling and plunged head-first into acting. However, not much was documented in the media about his foray into television. It was only much later that he resurfaced into our collective imaginations after his impressive running feats abroad, which included The Ironman Challenge (3.86 km swim + 180.25 km bicycle ride + marathon run of 42.20 km run within 16 hours) in 2015, and The Three-Day Ultrathon Challenge (10-kilometre swim and a 148-kilometre bike ride on day 1, 276-kilometre bike ride on day 2, an 84-kilometre run on day 3) in 2017. This feat feels even more interesting given that he runs without music. In fact, he hates listening to music, any music, any time.

He also tells me that in order to understand him better, I would have to read his book (*Made In India*, co-written with author Roopa Pai), which I did over a weekend in June. The book is as much about his life as it is about the act of running and pushing boundaries. “Writing honestly about running and about myself are nearly the same thing for me, so I suppose it felt natural when I was approached for the book to chronicle the biggest and best part of my life,” he says. The fact that he ran his first half marathon at the age of 37 is not only motivational

but has made me feel guilty about wasting all my previous gym memberships. However, what stuck out from the pages was the first 42-kilometre marathon he ran in January 2009 in Mumbai, which he dedicated to his friend Vinod, who had passed away a few weeks before. You can almost hear the cacophony of voices that must have run through his head during the marathon, while also not creating this gilded idea of running as easy.

FINDING FORM

Among the various plaudits he’s received during his lifetime, including the entrepreneurial initiatives he’s spearheaded, the Pinkathon (which raises breast cancer awareness among women) truly stands out. There’s a different level of sincerity and honesty that shines through when he talks about it – both in the thought behind it and how it has blossomed over the years. “I personally think the biggest message of Pinkathon is when women see others like them participating in the marathon and understand that it’s okay to take out time for themselves from their familial responsibilities; it’s okay to be selfish. It’s so important to remain relevant to ourselves, whether we have reached retirement age or not, without thinking about the society. Self-love isn’t bad,” he says, adding that it takes a whole different mindset to run a marathon, considering most people have a negative association with difficulty. “But what if we changed our mindset? Doing hard things really makes you realise why humanity runs from it. But, it’s important to be patient with yourself. Explore your body’s responses. It took me five years to graduate from running half marathons to full marathons. There are a number of people who have taken to running, and while it’s wonderful, there are many who push themselves too hard, trying to run a marathon within the year they start running,” he says.

The final leg of our conversation shifts to the idea of staying relevant in an industry that is bombarded with new faces daily. “I’ve been asked this question a number of times because, in many ways, it is related to age. I believe that if you are relevant to yourself at any age, and if you know what you’re doing is right, you will always stay relevant to others. If you are still learning from your life experiences, people will be interested in your story,” he says. **G**



Crew neck T-shirt, **Jack & Jones**, ₹ 799; checkered trousers, **Tommy Hilfiger**, price on request

Grooming **Riviera Vaz** at **Anima Creative Management**
Fashion intern **Lehan Devadhia**

The Master of India Modern

Be it his concept saris, quick-witted humour or his stance on style, the Tarun Tahiliani experience is all about unbridled extravagance

Photographs **RITIKA SHAH**
Fashion Stylist **OJAS KOLVANKAR**
Words **TANYA MEHTA**

On a Saturday afternoon, we find ourselves encased in Tarun Tahiliani's atelier in Gurugram. True to the designer's keen eye for detail, his headquarters is a teeming establishment of exposed red brick with bowing arches, a shrouded garden at its heart and flickering sunshine trickling through the skylight. The industry veteran recently completed 25 years of his label, and decided to celebrate the milestone in no ordinary fashion, as he guided a cluster of editors through the Qutub Minar by moonlight, with models dressed in his eclectic wares flocking around the monument. Today, across the desk, Tahiliani is chortling as he shows me TikTok videos of a young man decoding a fashion look on a mannequin. Over the course of our conversation, in his intrinsically candid flair the designer talks about the wonder years, his label at the inception and where the industry stands in such uncertain times.

A NEW ERA

"We launched at a time when 'fashion', as an entity, didn't exist. It's a different story now. There was no organised retail, there were very few boutiques. India was not homogenous like it is today, it was much more regional. You would never see a salwar

From L-R: Tuisha Trehan, assistant PR manager; Anwar Hussain, senior graphic designer; Mansha Sahni, couture design and sales head; Tarun Tahiliani, founder; Kanika Gupta, assistant accessories head; Sonu Sehgal, business project and admin head



kameez in the South, the country was still evolving from its socialist past, it was very elitist. This was a time of exhibitions, a time when Ritu Kumar was creating beautiful things; the period also witnessed Garden Vareli and Vimal campaigns styled by Rohit Khosla. The first time I was truly moved by a fashion spectacle was when Pierre Cardin held a runway show in India, which my wife (Sailaja) walked in. It was then that I realised the astounding need to create something larger. This was precisely when I decided to start the label, in 1995," he shares. Tahiliani, who has always been inspired by the Mughal era and the art of the drape, created a white shirt with a black transparent skirt over a *churidar* as one of his first documented ensembles, thus marking the beginning of the 'India Modern' aesthetic that is now synonymous with his work.

THE MANY MUSES

Over the years, the designer has become a favourite amongst the supermodel posse, with the likes of Mehr Jesia and Indrani Dasgupta frequently featuring in his campaigns. How then did the idea of a muse change for him? "I was told, albeit lightheartedly, that I have always had the worst muses because they were so elegant and refined. A woman can walk into a room with kajal-tinted eyes, fresh flowers in her hair and a *mulmul* sari and look absolutely stunning. A muse is a woman who connects you to another reality. Models aren't always muses, a muse is somebody who interprets your work, gives you direction, she reacts to your designs, and inspires you to create a different look."

GEN INTSAGRAM

Even though he's wildly entertained by the endless opportunities provided by social media, Tahiliani reminisces about a pre-Instagram era, "It was a lot more chic, you only sold to chic people. As the late Minal Modi, my close friend and muse, once told me, "I don't need a logo to buy something expensive, all I have to do is put my hand in it and I'll know if it's luxury or not." There was more authenticity when we started because people did it for themselves; they were not following a doctored vision of what they should be wearing. I think there is so much exposure today that it is hard for people to process," he explains.

ON ENSEMBLE

Tahiliani and his sister, Tina, started Ensemble in Mumbai, a first-of-its-kind multi-designer store in 1987. Over the decades, it still retains its iconic presence. "I don't think it has changed much; it's now not only dealing with a much wider canvas of people who are not Indians, but the establishment is also promoting things at a grassroots level. They have an astute understanding of the south Bombay clientele – from middle-aged women who have been frequenting the store for years to their style-conscious daughters who buy key pieces, repeat their outfits, and cherish heirloom jewellery."

THE BIG PICTURE

In a market waking up to the notion of diverse beauty and inclusivity, Tahiliani isn't one to be left behind, he wants his designs to be more relatable, "Even though we've cut our silhouettes for thinner women in the past, the drape is a



flattering silhouette for all shapes. I want to introduce a collection titled 'Luscious Delicious' for curvy women, to make them feel sexy."

The art of draping has become a marker of his design DNA, which Tahiliani has injected into wafty Grecian towns, hybrid-saris and skirts, and as he leafs through a book containing archival imagery from his show, he reflects on one of his most cherished collections "My heart belongs to ready-to-wear even though bridal-wear is an important pillar of our work. My favourite collection to date is 'Kumbh' (2013), because I actually visited the Kumbh Mela, a larger-than-life experience, and translated the riotous madness and intoxication into my trademark drapes, in shades of orange. It was wild. While fashion is about evolution, we must be connected to our past. The brand's tagline has, thus, always been: 'All that we were and more.'"

A NEW DAWN

With large weddings coming to a standstill, Tahiliani reflects on what will be the nature of bridal wear in the times ahead, "The ongoing pandemic has affected the high-end couture bridal sector adversely. With the rise of more intimate gatherings, brides are going to look at the quality of the craft as there will be no pressure of being up on a stage, and the ensembles they wear will be viewed more closely either by a small crowd or on Zoom calls. Brides will veer away from heavy-weight clothing and will purchase something of personal taste that will help them create memories. Outside of bridal wear, designers will lean towards creating lounge and resortwear, which can be further accessorised to be made dressy. People aren't going to dress up as they did, so fashion must re-adjust its outlook."

Astute, forthright and unwaveringly creative, David Abraham and Rakesh Thakore have made their mark in an industry once littered with excess, and 25 years later, we travel with them down memory lane and unveil all the pivotal moments of their illustrious métier



From L-R: Kevin Nigli, director; David Abraham, director; Pritma Nand Prasad, design manager; Rakesh Thakore, director; Sarah Wormila Raihing, shop manager

Catalysts for Change

Stepping inside Abraham and Thakore's design studio in Noida, you're bound to be hit with an instant case of bookshelf envy – housed neatly together are well-thumbed tomes on Islamic architecture and Grace Kelly as well as Tricia Guild's Think Pink – a visual guide on mood, colour and interiors. The founders of the studio are two immaculately-dressed gentleman – poised and whip-smart. Along the walls are small racks of black and white shirts and blouses bearing a variety of prints, but still uniform. Abraham and Thakore met at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, years before the inception of the Indian fashion industry as we now know it. The duo established their label in 1992, and were joined by their third partner, Kevin Nigli, soon after. As homegrown designs gained pace – saturated with glitzy bridal wear and embellishment, their brand offered a fresh slate – a classic, slow wardrobe for the modern woman that melded global influences, with attention to Indian craft and textile.

THE EARLY YEARS

Contrary to the traditional route, due to a lack of consumers on home turf, the duo started selling their creations to popular departmental stores overseas, "When we started our label, India was like a fledgling cottage industry. It wasn't exciting at all, which is why we began selling in London. We brought in our collection of handmade scarves to Browns, The Conran Shop, Liberty, Selfridges and the likes, which brought us major business. Later, we did a collection comprising two kimonos – one with polka dots and hand appliqué, and the other one with knots and crosses, which were also sold. This is how we built our business and created a factory for ourselves. Shuttling back and forth between here and London was exhausting, but it marked our starting point," shares Abraham.

ON MINIMALISM AND THE NINE YARDS

While their work isn't devoid of novel prints and detailing, the departure from bling has often typecast their aesthetic as 'minimal'.

Are they tired of hearing that term? "I don't think that we are minimalists because I think that it is a contextual sort of comment," explains Thakore, "I think in India, someone who doesn't cover themselves up with sequins and zardozi is a minimalist because we are so excessive. But, in the international context, I don't think we'd categorised as 'minimalists' because it depends on the sort of culture you are rooted in. If we were in Japan, we might be considered quite the opposite. The aesthetic there is refined and simple. So, while we don't label ourselves, we're quite flattered to be regarded as minimalists."

The kurta is a key piece that has been synonymous with the duo, or what they term as the "equivalent of a white t-shirt", and is a recurring sight through all their collections. But, they also share a very special relationship with the sari and have lent it their unconventional treatment over the years, a prominent piece being the *ikat* houndstooth sari and shirt from their A/W 2012 collection, which is now in the permanent archives of the Victoria & Albert Museum. "When Rajesh

(Pratap) was working with us, he possessed a grounding with the best weaving clusters across the country. So, he came with that vocabulary. For us, it was about taking that and moving it into a new space, juxtaposing it with fashion content. I remember for our first show, a black handloom sari and its *pallu* had a huge motif of a rickshaw on it because the entire collection was based on election symbols. We thought that was the only language for a semi-literate country. It was about taking something traditional and giving it a fresh context. Design is not only about reinvention, it can be about taking a classic blouse and pairing it with something different; that's fashion to me," shares Abraham.

THE MODERN WOMAN

Since they founded their label, the designers have been crystal clear about creating clothes for the professional woman, their A/W 2017 show, titled 'Back to Work' saw an interesting melee of shirts paired with floaty *angarkha*

jackets and *ikat* kurtas worn with cotton ties. "If we are dressing someone, then it has to be someone with an independent mind – a woman who doesn't follow the latest trends, is very sure of what she's looking for, and has her own innate style," says Abraham. This vision echoed through their first show in 2010 which saw an unanticipated line-up of handloom saris paired with platform shoes and bomber jackets. "It was a distillation of everything that we believed in – a very strong statement in indie cool. That collection ushered in a fresh approach that wasn't expressed adequately on runways otherwise, replete with big *lehengas* and wannabe European suits. We just mashed everything together."

A NEW DAWN

In a country fraught by a global pandemic, the duo has sage advice for young designers: "Be flexible; rethink every strategy; be super-quick to adapt; cut costs radically; don't worry about your competitors; focus on your own issues; and, work on solutions."



Clockwise from top: Akhilesh Sharma, COO; Rohit Bal, founder; Caesar Gour, head sales & marketing; Frazee Tasnim, head designer; Ayaz Ul Haq, head graphic designer.



Bad Romance

Beyond the edifice of the grandiose from days of yore, Rohit Bal proves that his work is deeply emotional, fashion-forward and not for the faint-hearted

If you're a 90s kid, you are sure to have memories of flipping through the 'Page 3' section of *Bombay Times*, a daily visual tableau of celebrities snapped around town at the most ritzy events and parties. A recurring appearance was made by a tow-haired gentleman with alabaster skin, a signature brooding stance, and almost always pictured wearing dark glasses. At a time when the Indian fashion was a fledgling, obscure industry, Rohit Bal injected it with heady glamour, spearheading not only a mammoth brand but becoming a brand in himself – a poster child for all things fantastical and painfully exclusive. From staging theatrical

shows to acquiring a roster of collaborations, the accomplished designer has been the one of the firsts to unfurl a golden age in homegrown fashion.

A MAN'S WORLD

We're at Bal's store in Defence Colony, New Delhi. Along the racks is an array of ivory – *bandhgallas*, jackets and embellished kurtas bedecked with the designer's exemplary lotus and floral motifs, velveteen *lehengas* with gold thread-work are paired with corset blouses and some with floor-trailing *anarkalis*. But contrary to convention, the designer started off with a menswear line much before he made his foray into womenswear, "The garments I designed were very different from what was available in the market then, this was a pre-Mughal, costume-based collection with a kurta pyjama; it was all about a strong Indian silhouette. I was catering to a niche, but it became commercially successful. I began selling my clothes at Ensemble and, soon, I had female clientele, and a lot of film stars, buying my menswear – a black jacket or a kurta, which they would have altered to their size. Back then, women

were used to wearing shimmery, slippery satin, which I was creating in organic *matkan*, *tussar* silk and *chanderi* – it became an intellectual, new look for them,” he shares. While there was a dearth of options, his clientele certainly did not lack style, “Shoulder pads and big boxy silhouettes were all the rage and women would buy an oversized jacket, roll up the sleeves, pair them with five-inch heels to give it a Japanese feel – it was all very interesting. Soon, I started creating the same pattern for them, but with a slimmer sleeve and an accentuated structure,” he recounts.

LOVE LETTER TO KASHMIR

Bal's motherland has been a perennial source of inspiration, as he has employed the indigenous *kashida* technique in a vast majority of his work. How then does he feel about a state fraught with political contingency? “It is awful, it feels like paradise lost, I grew up there and it was home for me. I still feel very attached to it and I visit as often

as I can. We launched a Kashmir initiative two years ago with Usha Silai, which aims to educate women in the Kashmir Valley on sewing techniques, their work has been a part of my most recent collections, including the ‘Guldastah’ show – we’re crafting shawls and saris with the artisans there. As a true lotus eater, everything that I do with be an ode to Kashmir. Despite that fact that it is a brutal war zone, my love for it will stay intact.”

UNGENDERED

While ‘gender-fluid’ has become a buzzword only much recently, Bal has always possessed an unabashed attitude towards eroticism and sexuality, often considered outlandish back in the day. His 2003 show witnessed brawny male models walk down the runway with *sindoor* on their crowns and *nathnis* on their noses, a new subversive take on machismo, for the designer it was beyond the shock-factor, “I think it is very difficult to draw a line between menswear and womenswear, it’s just all a big

blur. We come from a generation where men wore lungis, *dhobis* and even jewellery. Even in Hindu mythology, our gods could take on the form of both genders, so it’s always been a part of our cultural heritage, its only much recently that ‘androgyny’ has become a fashion term.”

THE ROAD AHEAD

Bal has been synonymous with his larger-than-life theatrical shows – whether it was his 2013 collection, where the runway was smattered with giant pink lotuses that bloomed and floated to the ceiling or his S/S 2015 show that was held against the back-drop of the Qutub Minar as models glided down a path laced with marigold flowers and chandeliers. We ask about what he thinks about fashion at the moment “I have shown at a lot of fashion weeks and for me it’s not just about putting clothes on the models, it’s about the drama, the eccentricity and the excess. For the 25 minutes that the audience gives me, I want to be able to transport them to a fantasy land. Putting on a show is a tedious, time-consuming task but that’s what makes it memorable. Today I perceive a loss in glamour, the productions seem lacklustre, as an industry we need to push, revamp, change, rethink and bring ‘fashion’ back in fashion week,” he says.

As we’re winding up our conversation, we’re joined by a member of his team, and Bal gets into an detailed discussion about a denim line that’s in the works as he sifts through an array of shorts in all hues and cuts, “Let’s put embroidered parrots on them, and chillies and ivory flowers,” he says, hinting at his innate eclecticism and constant quest for innovation, “I just shot these styles on eight male models in Goa, I think we’ll make a book out of the images. I want the denim to be spunky and trendy yet accessible so, we’re selling them on major online portals and stores. Fashion is all about freshness and excitement after all, don’t you think?”

A NEW DAWN

While Bal feels the ongoing pandemic will result in the survival of the fittest, he personally looks forward to the breathing space, “There will be a complete restructuring of the industry, physical store spaces will have to transition to digital platforms, and big businesses will definitely have to scale back. It’s time for consolidation rather than expansion. Since we aren’t leaving our homes, haute couture has been traded in for pyjamas, this is a time to press pause, focus on our health and reset.”



The Purist

Seasonless and undiluted – owning a Rajesh Pratap Singh creation comes with a promise of longevity and memories. Not one to be ruffled by the background noise, the designer talks about why he always sets his own pace



Clockwise from top: Sapna Mehra, director; Shatakshi Bajpai, textile designer; Avinash Kumar, Rajesh Pratap Singh, founder; Rattan Singh; Iqbal Hussain; Ojair Alam, all from Rajesh's design team.

On a misty morning in April, we find ourselves at Rajesh Pratap Singh's workshop in Faridabad. The establishment is a large stone-walled building with bright bougainvilleas creeping up on the walls. Inside, you will find yourself lost in a sea of indigo amidst the designer's samples of patchwork-denim jackets and pinstriped waistcoats spliced with the understated lustre of a gold blazer. We're here to shoot the designer and his team, comprising his sister Sapna, who handles the business and marketing aspect of the company, as well as two of his oldest *karigars*.

Singh launched his eponymous label in 1997 after graduating from the National Institute of Fashion Technology in Delhi. He trained under David Abraham and Italian menswear label, Marzotto. To state that the designer has just one forte would be unjust, and it's tough to ascertain his aesthetic — it's clean lines, structured silhouettes that are both old-worldly yet contemporary, it's the constant blurring of gender lines — where a pristine white day-dress can stride alongside a plush brocade trench coat. The white shirt has become a totem of his label, coveted by both men and women.

But the designer himself is reticent, he is unassuming despite his impressive body of work. He talks about his humble beginnings and creating for the love of the craft.

THE STARTING POINT

"We're all very old now," says Singh, as he sits across a cutting table fidgeting with a pencil and eraser. "We started work in 1996, at a time when the first and second generation of designers had already found their footing in the industry. The industry was all about what we were acquiring from the West. We were slowly getting that confidence about being Indian designers. We wanted to compete with designers outside of India. Some of us studied and some worked, we had a great time doing it. When the idea of launching India fashion week came up, slowly these small-scale businesses transformed into a legitimate industry."

Singh, who received his training under David Abraham even before he joined NIFT, remembers himself as 'the young guy with the motorcycle', making photocopies, but is grateful to the designer for taking him under his wings. His upbringing in Rajasthan, however, continues to influence his designs, "I was born in Rajasthan, in the small little town of Sri Ganganagar, and I lived most of my life in Jaipur. The desert and mountains have a lot to do with me. You don't consciously think about those things, it just happens to you. I

feel that if you are working with a lot of freedom, it shows in your work". Through his work, he has managed to portray a distinctive take on sartorial cues from his hometown — as seen through *dboti-trousers*, *churidars* and *angharka*-style jackets paired with midi skirts, and treated to his signature pin tucks and knife pleats. But his women never look austere, despite the traditional tailoring. Instead, they appear sharp but graceful.

KEEPING WITH THE TIMES

Singh emphasises that his clothes are, and always will be, about people, and he isn't one to be driven by monetary outcomes. While innovation is key, he has consistently followed a slow process, creating pieces and separates that are heirloom-worthy for consumers who understand the true significance of his work, "I know nothing about numbers although I went to business school at one point. For me, it wasn't ever about making money. It was about making new things, and that's who we are. We were lucky that there was a certain clientele that understood what we were trying to say. A lot of what we earn goes back into making new things. Luckily for us, a lot of our customers have stayed. Their kids have also jumped onto the bandwagon. The people who understand what we do, they have a need for our product in their life. That is how we stay relevant. My customers are my closet friends now; they've taught me a lot. Have they changed? I don't think so. It's something that is so elementary. It is a language that stays on."

While the designer works with his sister, his wife Payal, also his peer at college who has her own label, we catch hints of her feminine floral dresses along the racks. Is there a creative exchange or conflict between the two designers? "We are a painful lot," he chuckles, "We fight often, but they give me the freedom to do whatever I want. Making clothes is my thing and they give me the independence to do that.



They make sure that the bills are paid, they are not critical of my work."

Singh doesn't admit that he likes to stay away from the spotlight, he does however share about the qualms he had when it came to putting his name on a label. In fact, for years, the tags featured his middle name in order to preserve a sense of anonymity. How, then, does he feel about helming a brand in an age of social media apex? "I think it makes things very democratic. The low hanging fruit gets hit first, there is no editing. The speed is amazing. I think there's too much emphasis on speed at times, my generation was not built for this. But it is something that we are adapting to. I still work with my hands. I see young kids work with it, so fast and so beautifully. I am not saying we are obsolete. We grew up with telephones that we had to dial. So, things have moved on very quickly. I don't see many people writing anymore."

A NEW DAWN

In June this year, Singh was appointed as the creative director for Satya Paul, a heritage brand known for its vivid colour palette and gossamer saris. The designer plans to bring in a fresh artistic direction for future collections. But, the industry is still shrouded with uncertainty in these testing times, how then should designers adapt? "Go digital or go home, the longer the pandemic the greater the change we can expect in consumer behaviour. The traditional tools of communication, sales and marketing platforms will change forever. Minimalism and sustainability will be readdressed widely and in depth. Authenticity of brands and origin of goods will be of greater consequence," he says.



A Royal Affair

JJ Valaya is a luminary that pioneered the Indian fashion scene from its nascent phase. Reserving his status as one of the country's most talented couturiers, 30 years later, he looks back at his expansive body of work, and what lies ahead

Off the clamorous din of the city centre, JJ Valaya's palatial headquarters at Shanti Farms is a sprawling estate comprising green lawns and bubbling fountains. While the sweeping structure is still under construction, it will house his bridal atelier, his home line and a creative space to showcase his photography, a cherished avocation of the designer for years. The mannequins bedecked in his opulent creations – *lebengas* bearing intricate bird motifs in plush shades of vermillion and navy, adorned with tiers of *zardozi* embroidery, fastened with embellished cummerbunds – all capture the quintessence of his eponymous brand. Dressed in his uniform (a kurta complemented by a waistcoat and a hint of a pocket square), the designer is encircled by his team – a garrulous young bunch comprising his daughter, nephews and nieces, all of whom play pivotal roles in the company today. While the market might be saturated with a host of new names, Valaya has always maintained an unruffled disposition, as he sheds light on the highlights that have defined his incredible journey.

GROUND ZERO

“When I enrolled at the National Institute of Fashion Technology, the fashion industry was virtually non-existent. We were a small batch of 30 students with very little to draw inspiration from. There was Doordarshan, which certainly never covered fashion. There were no newspaper supplements covering fashion, and if we ever did get our hands on an international publication, it was treated like the holy grail, that we took turns reading. Efolio in Bengaluru was the first luxury retail destination for designer labels. I was fortunate to start at a time when there were no benchmarks to follow, we had nobody to refer to as a measure success or failure. So, we learnt from our own mistakes,” he reflects.

THE ROYAL NOMAD

A mainstay and constant source of intrigue for the designer has been wanderlust and royalty, which is observed in the spectacles that he has staged on the runway – women in bejewelled turbans alongside men in ornate *angarkhas* in gold and ivory.

“Our brand has always been synonymous with royalty. We use the word ‘nomad’ because we travel from civilisation to civilisation, from culture to culture, I want couture to be timeless. I feel great pride when Valaya brides from 25 years ago are returning with their daughters today, who want their mothers’ garments to be altered to their size, it’s the ultimate gratification.”

TALES OF THE ALIKA

If there was a singular piece that is symbolic of

Valaya's work, it is the 'Alikā', a structured shirt-jacket bearing a *bandhgala* collar and raglan sleeves that the designer has reinvented through the seasons, be it an embroidered version with Swarovski crystals encrusted with mirror work, or crafted in creamy velvet, "It was my endeavour to create something classic within the brand. Chanel did it too with their tweed jacket, which is coveted even today. I wanted to create a versatile silhouette, which the 'Alikā' is. You can wear with a sari, over a dress, or even with jeans."

STYLE IS ETERNAL

Even with his early work, Valaya has showcased exceptionally unconventional skills while styling his silhouettes – slitted skirts worn over *churidars*, or bomber jackets with short *lehengas*. We ask him where these ideas sprout from, "I distinctly remember the time when we created this *lehenga* with lots of tulle in ivory, paired with a sexy blouse and shot it on Neha Kapur, the Miss India back then. We sold 180 orders of that silhouette. While I do like to experiment, I also feel that overt gimmickry can often be tiresome."

CHANGE OF THE GUARDS

After helming his company for over two decades, I ask the designer what's next. We're joined by his young daughter, Hoorvi, who is currently studying fashion design and is the prospective heir to his couture kingdom, "I think it's nice that we are still grounded in our roots, and in Indian tradition and culture. Several other brands are trying too hard to be modern. We are constantly ideating to

create clothing that's aspirational yet relatable," she says. Backed by years of experience, for Valaya, the importance to slow down and evaluate is imperative.

"A few years ago, I attended couture week and most of the collections I witnessed seemed bland. I don't think new age creatives are really paying attention to the purity and spirit of creation. It's now all about making embroidered clothes and selling them. This was exactly what prompted me to take some time off. I realised that my true strength is couture, and that I don't want to just open a store anymore, I want to create an experience," he smiles.

A NEW DAWN

While the pandemic has hindered the growth of the industry, Valaya views it as a means to hit restart, "The negative implications of this global episode are reduced sales and a regressive market. But, what interests me are the positives, I've always believed that fashion had complicated things for itself by forgetting that its primary objective is to simply create beautiful clothes and make people wearing them feel happy – a non-hurried passion for creating fabulous clothes, no rat-race required. We had entered an era of too many choices and poor quality and workmanship, all that is bound to change. The pandemic may, perhaps, have managed to achieve the impossible by putting a hard stop to a constant quest for one-upmanship. The post-pandemic era will give birth to a slower pace, better quality and timeless fashion."

From L-R: Ananya, fashion consultant; Priyanshi Shivhare, assistant designer; Gobind Singh, retail head; Juuhi Singh, merchandising and marketing head; JJ Valaya, founder; Hoorvi J Valaya, design-research and development; Neha Grover, senior fashion consultant; Tanya Raizada, assistant designer; Aishwar Lamba, assistant designer.



The Front Runner

Melding disco glamour with contemporary athleticism, Namrata Joshipura has been a purveyor of the new cool, and even with the tiding seasons, she isn't ready to slow down

When you walk into Namrata Joshipura's homely workshop in Noida, a hard-to-miss, large sepia-toned photograph on the wall stares you in the face. Lensed by Tarun Khiwal, the image is of a model against white drapes dressed in an embroidered tweed pea-coat with a pleated skirt – a campaign for the designer's preliminary collection. Though her aesthetic has evolved since then, the look is relevant even today. Joshipura has been a millennial at heart from the get-go, her genre of cocktailwear has displayed an effortless pallor – embroidered slip dresses, slitted jumpsuits and her true to form, beaded pantsuit. It's been shimmer and shine, all in the right doses, with a heavy emphasis on wearability. But before she blew up on the scene a decade ago, Joshipura spent several years in New York. Here, she talks about her cross-cultural odyssey, and the exciting moments that came along.



Clockwise from top: Gaurav Kohli, head of production; Mohammed Hazim, tailor; Ashish Tyagi, admin and inventory controller; Shamshad, tailor; Namrata Joshipura, founder; Jamil Ahmed Ansari, pattern master.



BETWEEN TIMEZONES

Before she launched her own label, Joshipura trained under celebrated couturier, Suneet Varma, “He taught me discipline as well as the art of embroidery, I knew however that my sensibilities lay more in prêt. I started out with a small team comprising three tailors, a master and three embroiderers. It was a tough journey because I grappled with the business part of it as well as the logistical nightmares involved. But just two years into starting my brand, there was a competition for young designers at Hong Kong Fashion Week. I sent in my entry, and won. It definitely was a morale booster. When I shifted base to New York, I launched an accessories label called ‘Nam Josh’, under which we created beautiful, embellished hairbands. I also had the good fortune of stocking my wares at several department stores, such as Henri Bendel.”

After a nine-year stint, with her feet firmly placed in both countries, Joshipura finally moved back to India in 2009, but the Big Apple had left its subtle influence on her, “I was living downtown, near New York University, where individualistic style and energy was palpable, that’s when the importance of being relatable struck me: I always want to be able to wear my own creations,” she says.

MILES AHEAD

A change of location, and a decade later, I ask Joshipura who she’s designing for, “As a woman designer, I have the privilege

of understanding our bodies firsthand. To me that’s my power. That is what I want to explore more but I don’t want to be overtly sexy, that’s not my style. But at the same time, I like women to be unapologetically glamorous themselves. I don’t think that it makes them any less intelligent if they just dress up that way”. A couple of seasons ago, Joshipura mashed her typical understated glitz with a refreshing athleticism, replete with graphic jerseys and iridescent varsity jackets, “I am a runner; I am a trekker, and so I spend a lot of time outdoors. I wear a lot of cycling shorts, which is something that I have always wanted to use in my shows. I want my line to be an extension of my life, so I fashioned a pair in leather and sent it down the runway. One of my most memorable shows would be the ‘Get Down’ collection, which is from three years ago. It had a high-meets-low feel to it. This was also the first time I had dabbled in athleisure, which has been a prevailing mood for the seasons that followed.”

THE NEXT CHAPTER

We catch Joshipura at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic has prompted an indefinite rescheduling of fashion week, forcing her to cancel her show that was slated to be held the very next day. But, that doesn’t dull her spirits as she excitedly tears through garment bags like a child in a candy store to show us all the looks she had planned for the runway. The collection is a reflection of the in-depth understanding Joshipura has for transitional separates – emblazoned denim dresses, embellished blazers and her pièce de résistance – a pair of paisley-embroidered cycling shorts with a matching bralet, worn with a trailing white jacket.

Joshipura works in tandem with her husband, Vivek, who handles the export arm of her business, while her daughter is currently studying in Vancouver. We ask: Does she plan on taking over the reins of the business in the future? “I don’t think so,” Joshipura quips, “She’s currently not in that zone, however she’s a big hip-hop fan, and will routinely send me songs that she feels I should use in my shows.”

Up ahead, the designer aims to immerse her fondness for outdoor sports more into her work, “I end up buying all my sportswear abroad, which is the reason why I want to start an athleisure line that’s functional yet fashionable, something you’d look good in even while running errands.”

A NEW DAWN

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, Joshipura shares her views for the path ahead, “Our factories are running at less than one third of capacity due to the Covid-related safety measures set in place. The situation has offered us a chance to break from the past and set a new paradigm. My advice to emerging brands would be to find your niche and lean into it aggressively. Clearly, the future is digital, and the long tail within that world is the reality – you cannot be a one-stop clothing or accessories brand with a broad list of SKUs. Keep your overheads in check and specialise.”

The Outlier

A true master of maximalism, Manish Arora has built a brand of acclaim that travels beyond borders. Many runway shows later, he talks about how his work will always be deeply rooted in the Indian craft



New Delhi's Dhan Mill compound is where the cool kids are at. It's where you'll find coffee shops with lofty ceilings and rustic furniture all straight out of a Pinterest board. It's no surprise then that this space is also home to Manish Arora's workshop, a chintzy studio full of stained-glass hearts, artwork and mirrors. The designer himself is dressed in a cacophony of colours as he steps out of his beloved gold Ambassador with a ring on every finger, and a wrist band that says 'Naah, I'm good'.

But we haven't met him on a regular day – his workspace is chock-full with his most memorable looks from over the years, a curation for his 30th anniversary presentation at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, which is set to take place in 2021. We catch glimpses of sequinned onesies in sapphire blue and poufy peach gowns encrusted with pearls.

It's an understatement to say that Arora's work is off kilter. Born and raised in Mumbai, the designer studied at the National Institute of Fashion Technology in New Delhi and then went on to launch his namesake label in 1997. His designs have always been larger than life – bursting with colour, wildlife motifs and psychedelia. In 2005, he made his debut at London Fashion Week, and has been a permanent fixture on the international runway calendar. His aesthetic is resolute – it's layered, provocative and perhaps not for everyone. But that's what further cements his ideology – he isn't catering to the plain Jane.

YOUNG, WILD AND FREE

"In the days that we started, the infrastructure and facilities were different. People were not aware of what was happening internationally. But there was more freedom to express what was going on in our mind, we could take risks, we could be more extravagant compared to businesses that are being launched by people today," he says. We ask him about the first garment he ever made, "For one of the first collections I made I bought these kurtas in khadi and used appliqué on them. It was the in brightest pink, which is my identity. It had reflective flowers on it, so that part has stayed from then to now."

The sheer conspicuousness of his designs prompts several observations about his work but, as always, the devil is in the details. His collections have always been deep rooted in celebrating pride, self-love and spirituality – his models waft down resembling otherworldly creatures. It's far from an ordinary experience.

"People often call my work kitschy, which it isn't. Kitsch refers to design in poor taste, often from another time, thereby questioning its relevance. My work is much deeper than just the visuals of it.

The techniques used are all ancient Indian techniques – like *zardozi* paired with very unusual materials and brocade, sourced from Benaras to Surat, has been a mainstay. These textiles and embroideries create visuals that are very modern. And sometimes, people who don't know much about the technicalities about embroideries or textiles or surface embellishments may perceive it as kitsch. But I am far more than that. Being colourful and technique-oriented is what my work is about. Yes, it is over the top because I think more is less. For me, that's very normal."

CULT OF COOL

While Arora wants his work to be recognised by a wider audience, he isn't concerned about fitting in, and that's probably what placed him on the world map, "My work is unique because it's a combination of art and fashion. When the taste of a person is unique in terms of style it's possible to be relevant for a longer period of time than others, that happens only if you do something straight from your heart without getting diluted by other influences around you. It is not easy, but it gives the brand a stronger identity. My work is recognised my friend's children in a magazine and is also identified by somebody who is 80 years old. Also, working the international calendar has kept my identity intact."

If you sift through Arora's designs, they come with a promise to made heads turn and grab eyeballs – whether it's his quirky sweatshirt that says, 'I am the one I've been waiting for' in saccharine pink or a mini skirt with a chartreuse appliqué heart. Who does he think of as his ideal muse? "Wearability is a state of mind. What it is to me, may not be to someone else. My muse is someone who has a very strong dressing sense of their own, like Katy Perry. I like a person who is ready to stand out in a crowd, is not shy of being themselves, and doesn't care about what other people think."

Over the years, the designer has explored his skill set via diverse areas, resulting in several memorable collaborations. He's teamed up with watch brand Swatch, skincare brand Kama Ayurveda on Valentine's Day to launch the #LoveisLove Box in his signature fuchsia pink as well as jewellery label Amrapali, which offered everything from spikes earmuffs, enamel deer motifs and cupcake rings. And of course, there's Fish Fry – a second brand launched by him almost two decades ago that produced an athletic diffusion line with accessible price points, which also joined hands with Reebok for a line of quirky sneakers, "Even though we don't work on Fish Fry anymore, it's amazing how so many years later the brand still has incredible recall value and

is mentioned many times in my conversations with people."

WORLD STAGE

Arora was invited to showcase his collections on the international runways at a time when it was a rare privilege, and the process of breaking through was every bit daunting, "When I went to London for my debut, I had no stylist or PR agency, the hair and make-up was done by the same person. It was all about starting from ground zero. The advantage of being Indian at fashion week is that you can portray India in the way that you wanted to. The disadvantage was that there was nobody's footsteps to follow in. I still remember the first time somebody told me that Kate Moss was wearing my creation on a magazine cover, and I didn't even know who she was, but that's the beauty of the business, you're always evolving, always learning."

NEW DAWN

As she spends his time between Paris and New Delhi, Arora feels that current times are all about turning over a new leaf, "We will move towards a more digitised world; devoid of physical connection, we will now come together like never before. People will also start investing in more homegrown brands, and will value designers and artists from India." **GL**

From L-R: Garima Madan, head designer; Manish Arora, founder; Dhruv Bandil, designer

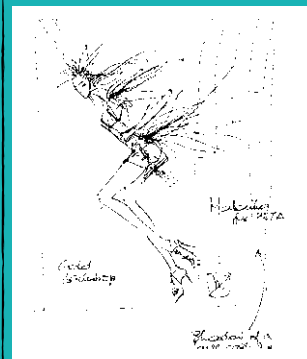




Malaika Arora in a look from the 'Visionnaire' collection, shot by Farrokh Chothia



A sketch for the Moda Goa Museum & Research Centre



Wendell would plan for shoes, scout for music and detail hair and make-up essentials



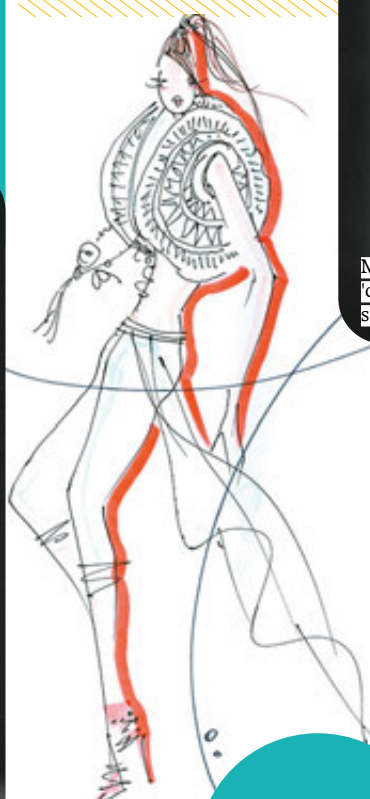
Rekha with Wendell in 2005



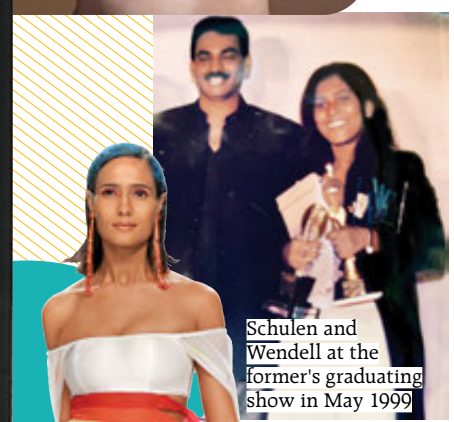
Ujjwala Raut



Bipasha Basu in a Wendell Rodricks creation



Meghna Reddy in a 'cutting on squares' cape. Shot by Rafique Sayed



Schulen and Wendell at the former's graduating show in May 1999



Nina Manuel by Rafique Sayed



A look from the 'Rainbow Warriors' collection, 2018

MASTER STROKE

The designer passed away in February, but his work has long proved to be far ahead of its time

For the late Wendell Rodricks, fashion was about understanding a woman's body. However, he was revolutionary in the way he approached it. Where corsetry created a static, airless ideal of a womanly shape, he worked with seams, stretch and drape to create a sex appeal that was raw and muscular. However, to truly understand the man – a genius who was always very generous with his knowledge and experience – one will be required to see him through the eyes of his protégé. Armed with the zeal to carry his legacy forward, Schulen Fernandes reminisces about her “greatest mentor.”

THE FIRST MEETING

“I remember meeting Wendell during my first History of World Costume class back in 1998, when I was pursuing a degree in design from Mumbai's SNDT College. He was a visiting professor and arrived on time with the most endearing, diastemic smile. Not only was he impeccably groomed that day, he spoke with deep insight and knowledge, and always kept it interesting for us students with amusing anecdotes from costume history.”

THE JOURNEY

“Our mentor-mentee journey started when I came to Goa for a three-month internship right after my graduating show, ‘Chrysalis’, in 1999. From the very onset, Wendell was nurturing. I guess we found a symbiosis in the next four years, where I learned and absorbed all that I know today of his pioneering minimalist-resort statement in style. When I came back to work with him in 2015, I was older, and so the dynamic changed a fair bit. He was more of an equal. Wendell's humility was almost embarrassing at times. When he would send his sketches and other design concepts to the studio, he would always say: ‘Feel free to shoot these down’, or ‘Schulen, please approve’. I will forever cherish the handwritten notes he would send me after every collection, thanking me for a job well done.”

HIS METHOD

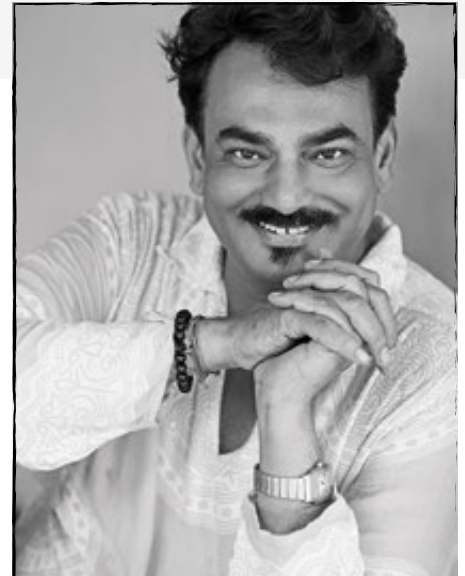
“Wendell was largely inspired by the history and culture of Indian clothing. He loved the sari, and studied Indian garments in depth, understanding that they didn't usually have a stitch on them. They were mostly draped. He used these aspects in his designs, where styles would have knots and ties as fastenings, never a zipper. His ‘cutting on squares’ method has inspired me the most. I have seen him create a spectacular evening dress out of merely one-and-a-half metres of fabric, which he would cut himself.”

PIONEER OF RESORTWEAR

“By adopting a Gandhian approach to his designs, he cultivated a ‘less is more’ aesthetic in fashion at a time when other designers were in the business of creating embroidery-rich, opulent silks and busy prints. He put Indian environment-friendly fabrics like handloom cotton, hemp and linen on the national and international ramps long before they were even considered fashionable. Wendell pioneered resortwear and sustainable fashion in as early as the mid-1990s. His decision to move back to Goa, shunning the glamour of urban culture, also lent the label a truth and originality that then became his unique style.”

INTERPRETING DESIGN

“He was never inspired to create trends, but always designed to establish a timeless style. Wendell kept Goa and India at the core of everything he did. He was proud of our textiles, culture and crafts. He always wanted his designs to have a positive impact on society at large, which included providing a visible platform to artists who would otherwise have never been able to reach an audience that he had access to. During my last conversation with him, he told me about how he was most proud of his work in reviving the *kunbi* textile and sari, as well as the ‘Visionnaire’ collection that was path-breaking in its Braille-embroidered design.”



SIMPLE PLEASURES

“The first thing I imbibed early on in my interactions with him was to be self-reliant. I also fondly recall how after quick work meetings, we would end up having a casual chat about the most arid things, which would then lead to a scrumptious meal complemented by a few glasses of wine. He would then walk me to the door, insist I enjoy an afternoon siesta instead of heading back to the studio, and see me off with a heartwarming smile.”

PASSION PROJECT

“Wendell's dear friend and celebrated award-winning cartoonist, the late Mario Miranda requested him in the late 1990s to write a chapter for a book on Goa. He did not realise that it would lead to The Moda Goa Museum two decades later. The book resulted in ten years of research and two museum internships in New York and Lisbon. Wendell and Jerome worked tirelessly to establish a centre of learning and history.”

THE LEGACY

“My blueprint for the brand has always been to explore our fashion trajectory beyond couture, and eventually also move into retail. I miss Wendell deeply, and I hope to keep his beautiful legacy of minimal design alive in ‘style forever’, as he would always fondly sign off.” ■

THE COOL KIDS

From travelling the world, jamming to top tunes, and interviewing A-list celebrities, this OG gang of VJs was our window to all things hip

Words **RADHIKA AGRAWAL** Photographs **KEEGAN CRASTO** Styling **SURBHI SHUKLA**

Today, we live in a world that's brimming with pop culture. But back in the 90s and early 2000s, it was highly exclusive. This, of course, was back when music channels were *actually* about the music. Growing up, there was nobody cooler than the VJs who introduced us to what was hip, happening, and 'in'. We managed to round up a few of the OGs — Maria Goretti, Mini Mathur, Ramona Arena, Yudhishtir Urs, Shruti Seth, and Shenaz Treasury — and the result, of course, was an undeniably infectious energy. It was not long before 90s music was blasting from the speakers and impromptu dance performances were being filmed. The cool kids had enveloped us into their crazy world, and it was difficult to remember that we were in fact, working.



Track suit, sneakers, **adidas Originals**

THE BOY WHO LIVED

Bubbling with energy and positivity, Yudhishtir Urs, fondly known as VJ Yudi, can liven up any room. Channel V signed him on after a countrywide VJ hunt, similar to the one MTV used to conduct. He hosted many shows, including *V Dares You*, in which he would go out on the street and ask random people to do crazy things for money. "For instance, I would offer ₹1,000 to anyone who was willing to put their hand into a tub of cow dung to find something," he laughs. A decade later and he is still pursuing his many passions — writing, directing, acting and dancing.

DEFINITION OF COOL:

"To be cool was to have a pulse for what's 'in', be it in music, films, or travel."

FAVOURITE MEMORY: "Aside from the friendships that I built, I loved that we got to travel a lot, attend many concerts and interview musicians. I remember the time when we got the chance to watch Coldplay live in Singapore, when the band had just released *Yellow*. We went nuts."

MAXIMUM GIRL

Unlike most other VJs, Mini Mathur was already on TV before she became one. She hosted India's first travel show, *Indian Holiday*, on Zee TV. So, when she heard about MTV's *VJ Hunt*, she felt confident enough to sign up. To her surprise, they sent her straight to the finale, and her VJing journey began soon after. "The training was rigorous – we were interviewing people from all walks of life, be it Amitabh Bachchan or a rickshaw driver," she says. She became the face for various shows, such as *MTV Classic* and *MTV Gao Baby Gao*. According to her, a VJ back then had to have their own style, be a 'people's person', and had to have the ability to bounce back from just about anything.

DEFINITION OF COOL: "The problem with being cool is that you don't realise it. We just went about swimming in the dark, and then one day we came across a generation that started talking to us like we had been influencing their youth – that's when it hit us."

FAVOURITE MEMORY: "I remember I once had to do an interview for *MTV Big Picture* with the entire cast of *Lagaan*, comprising 13 people who had never faced the camera. I truly believe that it was one of my best pieces of work, because when I got up, I saw this awe and love in everyone's eyes, which made me believe I had done justice to each one of them."



Dress, **Quod**; PVC heels, **Truffle Collection**

THE GIRL NEXT DOOR

When she was cast for the StarPlus show *Sbararat*, Shruti Seth came one step closer to her dream of being a VJ with Channel V. In fact, it was the producer of the rom-com show who got her an audition with the music channel for her birthday. "After my audition, I walked out and bumped into a stranger, grabbed them and said, 'I don't know who you are, but I have to tell you that I am the new Channel V VJ!'" she recalls. She was with the channel for about two years, following which she went on to host TV shows like *Comedy Circus*, and acted in shows such as *The Suite Life of Karan & Kabir*.

DEFINITION OF COOL: "It meant being unapologetic, quirky, silly, foolish, and doing things unabashedly without worrying about what people would think of you, because they thought you were cool anyway."

FAVOURITE MEMORY: "Once, Bobby Deol prank-called me while posing as a sleazy producer. I used choice expletives and was really mean to him. My producer caught all of it on camera. And of course, they aired it."



Button-down shirt, linen trousers, both **H&M Studio**; diamante necklace, **Swarovski**



Playsuit, sneakers, both **Shenaz's own**

THE DREAMER

Shenaz Treasury was only in junior college when she was noticed, and was asked to audition by MTV. "I didn't want to be in front of the camera at the time, because I felt it would be a short-lived career. Turns out I was wrong," she says. She recalls how she wasn't sure what the producers saw in her, but looking back, she wonders if it was just her ability to laugh and not take herself too seriously. She was young, and just wanted to have fun. Today, things are a lot more serious. As a content creator on social media, she edits, writes and shoots herself. "I'm the producer, director as well as the actor. And it's because of my MTV days that I can do it all so effortlessly," she says.

DEFINITION OF COOL: "I think I was quite a dork back then. I was just happy to have work. There was no social media, so I had no idea how popular I was."

FAVOURITE MEMORY: "Cyrus Broacha and Cyrus Sahukar were my two sweethearts. Broacha would talk my ear out – I could hear his voice in my sleep, but I loved it. I had a crush on Sahukar and I was always happy to be around him. We're still great friends."

SHE'S ALL THAT

It's hard to fit Maria Goretti into a category. She's a mother of two, the wife of an actor, but also the girl who once taught the country how to groove on her show, *MTV Hipshakers*. When she arrived on set in a striped shirt and comfy jeans, she ran to the clothes stand and picked out the craziest, most fun outfit for the shoot. "I dress so simply in real life. So, when I'm at a shoot, I like to go all out," she says. Perhaps, it's her way of holding on to the glamour and excitement of her VJ-ing days. She joined MTV sometime after Cyrus Broacha and Malaika Arora had become known faces. She created a distinct space for herself with various dancing shows, travelling shows such as *MTV Chill Out*, and lots more.

DEFINITION OF 'COOL': *"I didn't know I was cool until years later. But what I loved about being a VJ was that I had the freedom to be me. I was never told to talk, behave or dress in a certain way."*

FAVOURITE MEMORY: *"There was no bigger blast than when all of us VJs would get together to do a shoot for New Year's, once a year. It was a nightmare for our producers and directors, but we would have a ton of fun."*



Quilted blouse, tulle skirt, both **Quod**; drop earrings, **Swarovski**; PVC heeled boots, **Christian Louboutin**

MAKING HER MARK

If you're a KJo fan like me, you probably remember Ramona Arena from her role in *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* as Poo's best friend. Even though it was a small role, it got her noticed. But she was quick to recognise she didn't want to be typecast as a hot bimbo for all her future projects. So, as a singer who had also worked in radio, VJing was a natural progression for her. After winning *MTV VJ Hunt*, she went on to transform her show, *MTV World Chart Express*, into a full-fledged travel show, which made many of her contemporaries envious.

DEFINITION OF 'COOL': "Just the fact that I could say that I was a MTV VJ, was super cool. And even though the days of VJs may be over, it's still associated with a time when television was intelligent, and to me, that is cool."

FAVOURITE MEMORY: "Be it the peons, directors, VJs, make-up artists, or even people from finance, everyone looked forward to coming to work. You didn't want a day off, because work was just so much fun." **TL**



Pleated dress, **Rhea Pillai Rastogi**; drop earrings, **Swarovski**; sneakers, **Nike**

LAUGHTER RIOT

Words **RADHIKA AGRAWAL**

Styling **OJAS KOLVANKAR**

Photographs **KEEGAN CRASTO**

The OGs of comedy talk about the then and now of the Indian comic scene

Back in the 90s, comedy in Indian culture was limited to what we saw on the big screen – caricature-like Shakespearean fools that offered some sort of comic relief in an otherwise intense storyline. As a genre, it was often clubbed with other genres to fill gaps in the plot. But all of this changed with the emergence of the second wave of television, as MTV and Channel V started shelling out original content. Led by oddballs such as Cyrus Sahukar, Cyrus Broacha, and Anu Menon, the comedy space began to morph into something unfamiliar, yet fascinating. Perhaps for the first time, we wanted to tune into a music channel not just to listen to the top tunes of the day, but to watch these guys rant, play pranks and portray a hundred different characters.

Today, with comedy specials being streamed on every OTT platform, shows being sold out every weekend, and sketches going viral on social media, it's safe to say we've come a long way. While still not entirely acceptable to some, the idea of being a professional comedian is not as laughable as it used to be. But none of this would have been possible had the right tone not been set by the OGs of comedy, the 'weirdos' that came into the space and changed it for the better. We sat down with Sahukar, Broacha and Menon to talk about the good ol' days and how they compare to the situation today.



ODD ONE OUT: CYRUS SAHUKAR

Sahukar was not cut out to be a typical VJ. When he entered the space, he was surrounded by a ton of young, successful people who had very distinct personalities. "I couldn't understand how they could stay so 'on' all the time. I was quieter and more thoughtful," he recalls. And so, he



realised that playing characters helped him express himself better. Sahukar started creating a niche for himself with shows such as *MTV Fully Faltoo*, *Piddhu The Great*, and *Simi Girebaal*, which were spoofs of real personalities, films and content. "It was tricky to do it in a country like India, because

some of our stuff is already so funny. How do you spoof a spoof?" he laughs. But the bigger problem he faced was in the way people viewed comedy, i.e. through punch lines. Building character-driven spoofs took some time, but it eventually paid off – so much so that the parodies became more popular than the originals.

Once he quit MTV in 2010, things began to change for Sahukar. He was

Hair and make-up SURAJ TIWARI, Beauty Assistant MADHURA DEOKUTE, Fashion Interns LEHAN DEVADHIA AND SHWETA JAIN, Location Courtesy EARTH CAFÉ @ WATERFIELD, BANDRA

From left to right: On Cyrus Sahukar: T-shirt, jacket, Jack & Jones, jeans, **Tommy Hilfiger**, sunglasses, sneakers, both Cyrus' own
 On Cyrus Broacha: T-shirt, **Dsquared2** at The Collective, jeans, **Tommy Hilfiger**, sneakers, Nike
 On Anu: Printed dress, **Dhruv Kapoor**, sandals, **Charles & Keith**



unsuspecting people with hidden cameras ready to record their reactions. And even when the cameras weren't rolling, the prankster in him was always eager to find his next victim. Once, on April Fool's Day, he made his wife prank call comic Kunal Vijaykar to desperately request him to pick her up from Film City at 7:30 am. "By the time we called again, he had already left. He took three hours to come back, and he was super pissed with my wife, and that was beautiful – because it was all my idea," he laughs.

Having seen comedy transform in front of his very eyes, Broacha has had to find his place time and again in a cultural movement he had once led from the front. "People like Vir Das came onto the scene, became 'professional' comedians and screwed everything up for us (laughs)," he says. While what was funny two decades ago is still funny, the medium itself has changed. "Now, everything is so structured that it feels like you have to get a degree in comedy, like in medicine." For him, staying relevant is not important. Like any ordinary person, he just wants to continue doing what he loves to do. "There is too much pressure for us to be icons and set standards. I just want regular work, that's all," he says.

no longer part of a tribe. "What I really respect about those days is that I had a playground to try out different things," he says. In today's day and age, consistency is everything. Sketches have found their way onto the Internet, but in a shorter format. "With social media, you just can't afford to be lazy. But sometimes I also feel that it may stop you from creating something magical," he says. Every idea you have has been googled by hundreds of people before you, and therefore, plagiarism becomes a problem. Sahukar believes that the solution is making comedy more personalised, so that every story and piece is authentic and different.

But that's not the only issue comedy has to battle. We live in a very politically charged environment and comedians are not free from censorship. So, how does one say what they want to, without attracting trouble? "India is a very touchy country and at the end of the day, you are on your own. So, I don't blame people for staying away from political comedy, but I have a lot of respect for people who are pursuing it."

NEVER A DULL MOMENT: CYRUS BROACHA

The one thing you should know about Broacha is that he is never playing a part. He is as funny, goofy and sarcastic in real life as he is on TV. And so, in an industry that was dominated with attractive models and a very defined cool quotient, fitting in was not an option for him. "Everybody at the MTV auditions was extremely serious, and I just couldn't bear it. It was easy to stand out because I was simply not interested," he recalls. Having been an on-screen host, actor, author, podcaster and comic, there's very little Broacha has not done. But his most popular stint was *MTV Bakra*, in which he used to play pranks on





TWIN FORCES: ANU MENON

If you've grown up watching Channel V, you'll know who Lola Kutty is. A spinster from Kerala with a thick Malayali accent, who wears flowers in her oiled hair, and is irrevocably in love with Abhishek Bachchan. The character became so popular, it overpowered the person who was playing it — Anu Menon. "She became a living, breathing person to people, which is both touching as well as scary," says Menon. To this day, people recall things she said in character, expecting them to be true. "I am grateful,

though. It is not possible to resent something that you created."

When she first started out, no one had a clear path in mind for her. They kept her around because she was fun. "I began to think it would be cool to play a character that people do not expect to see on a music channel," she says. And that's how Lola was born. Almost a decade later, Menon decided to re-enter the comedy space, but this time, as herself. Her debut stand-up special, *Wonder Menon*, came out on Amazon Prime Video in June 2019. There was no sari, no accent, and no elaborate backstory — just a modern woman talking about her family, her failures and her daily struggles. "It was weird for me to find my own voice because I was so used to playing a character," she says. Menon believes that the industry has become more democratised over the years, so that more than a select few have the chance to showcase their talents. "Earlier, you first became Miss India, then a VJ, followed by a career in acting. Now, if you have something to say, you can just shoot a video and put it up online, hoping it goes viral," she argues. The middlemen have been cut out of the process, for the comedians as well as the audience. Today, you don't need to seek out trends on a music channel — the Internet makes sure they come to you. "The world has changed and that's fine. It's just evolution," she says. **W**





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DOUBLE *exposure*

Words **BARRY RODGERS** Fashion Director **PASHAM ALWANI** Photographs **KEEGAN CRASTO**

What's it like to constantly be around another human being who's just like you? These twins answer some of our burning questions





GAYLE & Deveney

From left to right: **On Deveney:** Multi-colour sleeveless dress with all-over gold sequin embroidery, oversized resin glasses chain, 'Disney x Gucci Tennis 1977' sneakers, all **Gucci**; sunglasses, stylist's own
On Gayle: All-over multi-colour floral sequin embroidered dress, 'Gucci 1955 Horsebit' small top handle bag, 'Gucci Tennis 1977' sneakers, all **Gucci**



Models Gayle and Deveney have not only graced the pages of countless fashion magazines, they've also had to field questions pertaining to genetics. Their natural red hair, fair skin and striking features have prompted people to ask them: Had their hair been dyed? Were they adopted? Were their parents foreigners? For the record, the answer to all those questions is a resounding 'no'. While the twins do have some European heritage in their family tree, they're as Indian as they come.

GRAZIA: Myth or fact: Do you always know what the other is thinking?

GAYLE: Twin telepathy is not real. We've never experienced it our entire lives. But considering I've known Dev all my life, I can definitely predict what she's thinking in certain situations and, sometimes, just by making eye contact we know we're thinking the same thing.

DEVENEY: It's definitely a myth. But after being together for 20 years, we kind of know what the other person is thinking or going to do in a certain situation.

From left to right: **On Amaan:** Cotton jacket, jacquard viscose shirt, cotton flare trousers, silk tie, 'Gucci Tennis 1977' sneakers, all **Gucci**
On Armaan: Textured woollen jacket, silk crepe shirt, cotton muslin shirt with ivy sunflower print, polyester gauzed pants, Shantung silk tie, 'Disney x Gucci Tennis 1977' sneakers, all **Gucci**



AMAAAN & armaan

The influencer realm is starting to see double. And luxury bloggers Amaan and Armaan, with their Instagram account (@thesoboguys), are leading the charge here, in India. While the boys say they play up “the twin thing” for their online personas, they maintain their individuality offline. They believe that with twins, you can showcase two different variations of a product, adding that there’s also an increased level of creativity that may not necessarily result from working individually.

GRAZIA: Have you ever been in a sticky situation with regard to your dating life? Have any of you liked the same girl?

AMAAAN: I can speak for the both of us when I say that it has happened in the past. We’ve also argued over it. But thankfully, we share a decent understanding. If we happen to like the same girl, one of us backs out or the other person decides what to do.



SUKRITI & prakriti

From left to right: **On Sukriti:** Monogram print faille short dress, silk organdy shirt with pleated sleeve, monogram print faille flared trousers, leather belt, 'Gucci 1955 Horsebit' shoulder bag, 'Disney x Gucci Tennis 1977' sneakers, all **Gucci**

On Prakriti: Jacquard bowling jacket, T-shirt, jacquard trousers, rose sheer socks, 'Sylvie 1969' top handle bag, 'Gucci Tennis 1977' sneakers, all **Gucci**

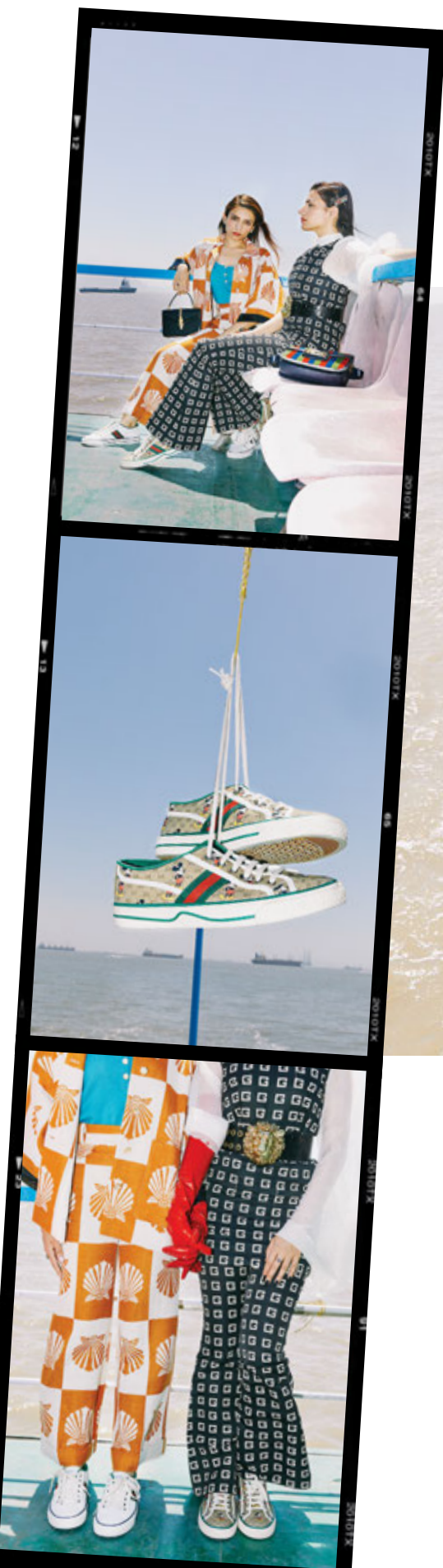


Sukriti Kakar and her sister, Prakriti, might be the first twins in the Indian music industry, but maintain that they're fiercely individual in their own right. While Sukriti has made a name for herself with songs such as *Pehli Baar* (Dil Dhadakne Do) and *Kar Gayi Chull* (Kapoor and Sons), Prakriti is known for songs such as *Bheeg Loon* (Khamoshiyan) and *Tu Hi Jaane* (Azhar). And while their careers took off individually, they never shy away from performing at live shows together. In fact, there have been times when they find themselves auditioning against each other. "Sometimes, one of us gets selected, and sometimes both of us don't. And we're okay with that," says Sukriti.

GRAZIA: Twins often dress similarly, why is that?

PRAKRITI: Well, when you're a kid, you don't really get to make your own decisions. We also have similar tastes, so it was only natural that we dressed alike. While growing up, we had one basic rule: If either of us got a new dress, the one it was gifted to would wear it first before the other could call dibs on it. Although we have our own stylists, we still share clothes and shoes.

SUKRITI: I think the only difference between Prakriti and myself is that she is little more edgy and experimental with her choices. I am more conventional. **LO**



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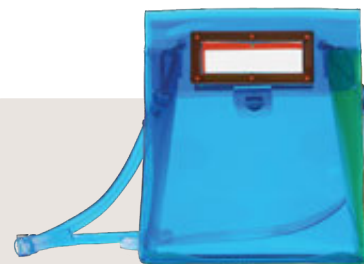
Come Rain or Shine

Here's a checklist of everything you will need to combat the monsoon

Fashion Stylist **GARVIKA KHANNA**

We are living in a time when getting out is no longer associated with socialising or entertaining, and is only reserved for absolutely essential errand runs. But the few times that you do get out, just because it is that gloomy time of the year, you don't have to necessarily depend on ill-fitting slickers, or hide your outfits under boring knee-length cover-ups. Opting for zingy pop hues and prints will make you stand out from the greys surrounding you. And, we've put together a bevy of all the practical yet on trend pieces to own this monsoon.

'Pico Baguette Charm' bag, Fendi, ₹ 57,000



Crossbody bag, **Zara**, ₹ 1,990



Boxy tote, **Tommy Hilfinger**, price on request



Printed sling bag, **United Colors of Benetton**, ₹ 2,999



Printed tote, **Ted Baker at The Collective**, ₹ 5,550

WE SEE PVC

It's time to push all your posh arm candy to the back of the closet and bring those chic but functional PVC bags to the front. They're the only saviour during a heavy downpour as they manage to keep your belongings dry. From the very OTM, cutesy micro purses to carry-it-all totes, choose what fits your purpose of outing best.



BALMAIN S/S 2020



KATE SPADE PRE-FALL 2020

BOTTEGA VENETA PRE-FALL 2020



DIOR PRE-FALL 2020



Belted parka,
Brunello Cucinelli, ₹ 2,27,535



Unisex 'Marsh' jacket,
Hackett London, ₹ 36,500

A WALK IN THE PARKA

Streetstyle stars have, for long, sported and popularised it as the go-to jacket for any weather, but its utilitarian roots make it the ideal outerwear for these wet months. There's many to choose from – whether you want to amp your outfit with zappy colour-blocking or prefer to stick to minimal nudes that go with everything, just make sure you pick a fuss-free piece in a compressible light-weight variant.



Polo sport jacket, Polo Ralph Lauren at
The Collective, ₹ 41,250



Padded rubber coat, Kassl Editions at
www.net-a-porter.com, ₹ 60,000 approx



Pocketable long parka,
Uniqlo x Marimekko, ₹ 4,990



DSQUARED2 PRE-FALL 2020

Silicone wedges,
Metro Shoes, ₹ 1,490



Patent leather
rainboots,
Jimmy Choo,
price on request



HAPPY FEET

When muddy water puddles are a common sight, who wants to test their favourite sneakers outdoors? It's time to rethink your footwear situation. The humble gumboot is our forever companion during rainy days, and a fail-safe way to keep feet dry. But if that's too stuffy for you, pick a functional, waterproof yet cutesy pair of sandals.

Lace-up heeled sneakers,
Melissa, ₹ 9,999



'Tri Alexia' sandals,
Clarks, ₹ 5,999



Ankle boots,
Stella McCartney x Hunter,
₹ 41,000 approx



Platform clogs,
Crocs, ₹ 4,995



GANNI PRE-FALL 2020



Sports zipper.
H&M x P.E.Nation,
₹ 5,199



Leggings.
H&M x P.E.Nation,
₹ 2,195



Cold shoulder training
Tee, high-waisted
leggings, Tommy Sports,
₹ 7,999 (for the set)



Waterproof running
jacket, Nike, ₹ 4,095

GYM CLASS (OR NOT)

Good news for all the athleisure lovers out there. Your polyester jerseys and elastane leggings work double duty – as workout gear (obviously), but due to their high absorbency, they're also perfect to wear in the rain. Throw your favourite anorak over it and tackle the bad weather with utmost ease.

BURBERRY PRE-FALL 2020



Circuit bodysuit, Michi at
www.mazeix.com,
₹ 20,640



FILA S/S 2020

Holographic,
Topshop,
₹ 4,140 approx



IT'S A COVER-UP

There's nothing more functional than plastic outerwear to shield you from the rain. And the good news is, raincoats are no longer uncool. A basic transparent piece would be the obvious choice when you want your outfit to shine through. But if you're in the mood for something playful, holographic or floral and animal print versions will come to the rescue.



MARC JACOBS PRE-FALL 2020



Printed bio-plastic, Ganni at
www.mytheresa.com, ₹ 7,230 approx



Transparent trench,
Maison Margiela at www.farfetch.com,
₹ 2,60,860 approx



MARINE SERRE S/S 2020



Embroidered, Simone Rocha
at www.matchesfashion.com,
₹ 1,47,505 approx



EMILIO PUCCI PRE-FALL 2020



Printed umbrella,
Cath Kidston, ₹ 1,495



Cellular smart watch,
Apple, ₹ 47,610



G-shock digital watch,
Casio, ₹ 8,095

EXTRAS ON FLEEK

They may not make it to your list of essentials but trust us, they make your monsoon so fuss-free that you won't look back. From waterproof watches that you no longer need to hide under your raincoat sleeve to bucket hats that are as on trend as they're useful in protecting your hair from a sudden shower, and cute umbrellas – these are all the extras that have our vote.



ALTUZARRA PRE-FALL 2020



PVC bucket hat, Prada
at www.shopbop.com,
₹ 26,110 approx



PVC belt, Balmain,
₹ 37,630 approx



SUPER trouppers

Make way for the catwalk's coolest set of 'It' girls

Photographs **ARSH SAYED** Fashion Director **PASHAM ALWANI**
Words **HENA DESAI**

The age of the supermodel may be a thing of the past, but for most of us who grew up idolising these women, they meant much more. They were the faces who transcended the clothes they wore, and attained such recognition as to be called celebrities in their own right. With distinct styles and perseverance,

they were also the forces that normalised dusky skin tones and diverse beauty in the media. This month, we're celebrating these dynamic ladies who continue to lead the pack – whether it's on the ramp or off, as successful stylists, entrepreneurs and more. Take notes as they tell you how to be a cut above the rest.

CAROL GRACIAS

"Look at models from back in the day and the first thing that grabs your attention is their distinct personalities. They were unique in how they looked and even walked on the ramp. Today, beauty is being cloned – everyone wants to look alike and ape someone else. Individuality is very important and those who develop it are doing very well even today."

Ribbed off-shoulder Tee, **ONLY**; 'Burst of Brilliance' layered necklace, **Farah Khan Jewellery**; rose cut diamond pendant, The Line shape rose cut diamond necklace, **The Line**

**DIPANNITA
SHARMA**

"People perceive modelling as a frivolous profession, but what they don't realise is that a lot of hard work and discipline that goes into it from a very young age. That trait has helped most ex-models become successful entrepreneurs now; they own their own salons, resorts or production houses as the next step in their careers."

Cotton vest, Zara ; 'Limitless Tower' earrings, 'Poetry in Motion Classic' diamond pendant, 'Poetry in Motion' delicate choker necklace, all Her Story ; diamond studded dagger pendant necklace, The Line

LAKSHMI RANA

"Modelling isn't only about looking good on camera. I always tell the new generation of models to develop a strong personality that speaks for itself; it'll translate to your work too. Be your own competition, critique your work and make a mark in the industry – that's the only way you'll sustain."

Strappy camisole, **Zara**; 22 kt gold chains, **Om Jewellers** ; 'Poetry in Motion Duet' necklace, 'Limitless Triad' Ring, 'Poetry in Motion' rings all, **Her Story**; golden plated bird ring, **Tribe Amrapali**



VIPASHA AGARWAL

"When I walked in for auditions, I'd instantly be rejected because of my skin colour. But I persevered and went on to become the face of several campaigns for major beauty brands like Lakmé and Garnier. I'm glad that the narrative is changing now – it's more about talent and less about one perceived notion of beauty, whether in fashion or films."

Button downshirt, **Michael Kors Collection**; 'Grace Dazzling' diamond earrings and 'Grace Dazzling' necklace both, **Jaipur Gems**; solitaire pendant, **Om Jewellers**

BHAVNA SHARMA

"Stop calling yourself #supermodel, and replace competition with compassion. Beauty lies in being humble and grounded, and that will always reflect in your work. Remember, nobody can look like, and no one can take your place."

Pleather shirt, **H&M**; shell earrings, **Swarovski**; gold plated charm necklace, pearl pendant necklace, both **Tribe Amrapali**; all rings, **Jaipur Gems**



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à la MODE

Eight talented chefs, eight equipped kitchens, eight delicious dishes

Words **RADHIKA AGRAWAL**

With zero scope of stepping out of our houses during the lockdown, we've had no choice but to find joy inside. While most of us have donned the sous-chef hat and dipped our feet in the kitchen waters, these eight chefs have taken their culinary game to the next level. Here, they talk about one sweet or savoury dish that they have experimented with during the course of this isolation period, and what their experience was like.



"A few days ago, I was asked by Grazia to be part of their home chefs series, and make a dessert. After much deliberation, I thought: You can't go wrong with a French classic – madeleines! There are so many gorgeous flavour combinations you can make with these, but I went with a personal favourite – the brown butter variety, topped with a beautiful chocolate ganache and almond sprinkles. They're ridiculously easy to make and, needless to say, taste like heaven... a perfect buttery treat to indulge in this monsoon season."

Jeena Billimoria, home chef



"During this pandemic, food has been the ultimate comforter for so many of us. I wanted to make sure we all had access to extremely easy dessert recipes at home that don't even require ingredients like butter, flour, oil and other common baking ingredients. Two of my favourite recipes are the Parle G cake and oreo cake. Both these recipes require minimal ingredients and are an absolute delight to whip up and eat. To top it all off, these cakes are eggless, and one of them can even be made without the help of an oven."

Shivesh Bhatia, self-taught baker and food blogger



"While my penchant for eating healthy is what drove me to take my passion for cooking professional, like any normal person I harbour a strong sweet tooth. But I had only ever dabbled with desserts and baking. The extra time during the lockdown and the mood to indulge in more treats than usual led me to my oven more often than ever. I took it upon myself to bake the perfect vegan cookies – crisp around the edges, chewy in the centre, with large puddles of chocolate and specks of flaky sea salt. And success! This has given me the confidence to keep baking. Stay tuned for a fine balance of healthy meals and naughty treats from me."

Karishma Sakhrani, chef



"I did what everyone did when the lockdown started – I stuffed my fridge senseless. One thing that I learnt about buying 12 barquettes of blueberries is that they go bad faster than you can eat them. So, I went on a mission to create the best winterberry preserve to ease into lockdown summer mornings. After a couple of trials, the preserve that I was left with (which I call BLEUE) was a combination of blueberries, currants, blackberries and balsamic. It works wonderfully with breakfast pancakes, as swirls in cake batter, in iced tea, and most importantly, as a delicious cocktail mixer. I simply can't get enough."

**Prateek Bakhtiani,
founder of Ether Chocolates**



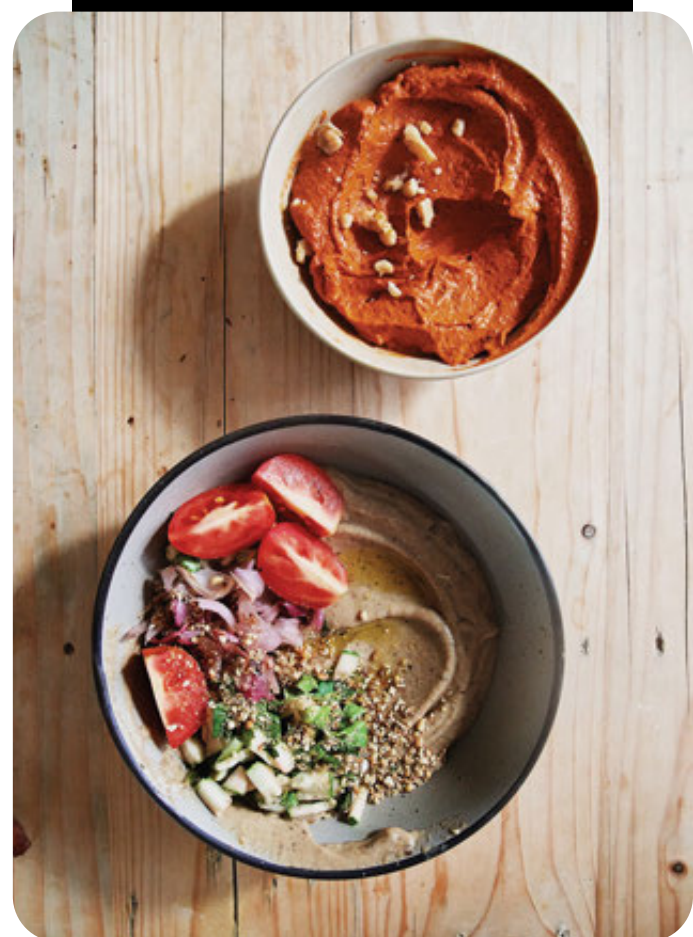


"I've been making dips for my kids for years, and the yoghurt garlic dip has always been a favourite with their friends and ours. This lockdown gave me the chance to experiment with ingredients that I'd been using for daily meals, but in a different manner. Beetroot, soy sauce, kausundi mustard – these are ingredients I use regularly, but that they could turn into a beetroot hummus, a honey mustard dressing, and a dark soy glaze, I never imagined."

Ritu Lohia, founder of The Kitchen

"I have always cooked without rules. Keeping myself busy while staying at home pushed me to try things that I would generally not make. Elaborate cakes with icing, baking bread, making dressings and curries – I did it all. This lockdown has been a super rewarding time, and I can now easily throw a feast. This *muhammara* (Palestinian dip) and lentil soup are eaten across all of Central Asia and the Mediterranean, and are extremely flavourful."

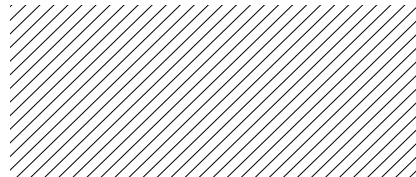
Shiva Kant Vyas, home chef






"Vangi bath (vegan) is a South Indian dish that originated in Karnataka. Its literal translation would be 'a fried brinjal', but I have a different way of making it. The idea is to use an authentic recipe, but make it more presentable by playing with different textures of aubergine."

Rohit Ghai, chef patron at Kutir



"A dish I've managed to master in this lockdown is this sweet Parsi style ravo (semolina). It's like a Parsi version of suji ka halwa. It's been tricky to try and get the right consistency, but it's an easy dish and one that evokes beautiful memories from my childhood. It just needs a few ingredients along with some patience, and since I've been stuck at home, I've had plenty of both. It's tasty, easy to make and comes together within minutes, which is entirely my style of cooking." 

Roxanne Bamboat, food blogger



For recipes, visit www.grazia.co.in

➔ MONTH IN MONTH OUT

MOVIES, ART, BOOKS, AND MORE, HERE ARE OUR TOP PICKS OF THINGS THAT GOT US TALKING THIS MONTH



Rahul Bose

Rahul Bose has been in the industry for longer than I have been on this planet. And yet, he's never quite gotten the limelight that an actor of his calibre deserves, at least on the silver screen. Following in the footsteps of many underrated actors such as R. Madhavan, Piyush Mishra and even Saif Ali Khan, Bose is all set to make his debut in the digital space with the Netflix Original, *Bulbbul*. Produced by Anushka Sharma and Karnesh Ssharma, the period drama tells the story of a child bride who grows up to find herself in a world filled with horror. We sat down with Bose to find out more about the film, his role in it, and how it has helped him resuscitate the actor in him.

GRAZIA: Tell us about the extraordinary world that *Bulbbul* is set in.

RAHUL BOSE: It's set in the late 1890s in

come together?

RB: The supernatural bit is the spine of the story. It is where the director has used this genre to make the comments that she makes. Much like a graphic novel, the supernatural context heightens the reality of the film.

G: What are some of the layers to the patriarch you play in the film?

RB: He believes that he's a very compassionate, gentle, just and kind man. But when things happen that make him behave otherwise, he blames it on other people. He hides behind the façade of, "I didn't want to shout at you. Your behaviour made me do it." He represents classic patriarchy, misogyny and violence against women. I don't want to give the game away, but there's a lot more that you will see in the film than what I've told you.

A FRESH START

This new film promises a supernatural period drama

G: You've been in the industry for a while now. Do you think OTT platforms are giving actors such as yourself a chance to reinvent themselves?

RB: It's a question of salability. My career was dead in the water. I'm not salable on the big screen for a 25-crore film – I can't justify that cost. With OTT platforms, I've gotten a second lease on life. In the last few years, I've shot a long mega series with one of the premier digital platforms of the country, which hasn't released yet. I've shot another series with a very meaty guest appearance. So, I've been working as an actor for two and a half years – who would've thought? I've been writing my next film as a director, but I had never imagined that I would be acting again, especially not as a lead in mega series and films.



Bulbbul, the child bride

NEW WAVE

Take a poetic journey into love, heartbreak and longing



Sameer Rahat

It's an exciting time for music globally, with young artists blending genres seamlessly, making it impossible to box these acts in. Rappers are taking the emo route, pop stars are dabbling in hip-hop, and some artists are so comfortable mixing different styles that it's impossible to label them. This holds true for Mumbai-based poet, singer and music composer Sameer Rahat. His style stems from seemingly varied influences. He writes in Urdu and Hindi and creates music that's influenced by indie-pop and folk music. With his debut solo album, *Aamad*, which literally means 'arrival', Rahat takes charge with his affinity for soulful melodies woven into every verse of this 31-minute project. His lyrics read more like spoken word poetry, drawing from contemporary progressive Urdu poets. Here, Rahat talks about blending genres and staying true to who he is as a musician.

GRAZIA: Your debut album, *Aamad*, translates to 'arrival' in Urdu. What kind of statement did you want to make with your music?

SAMEER RAHAT: *Aamad* is a word that has always resonated with me in a special way. There are two reasons behind it: It can be attributed to the extensive poetic usage of the word in Urdu literature, where it usually refers to a fleeting

thought in the subconscious, or a thought that comes to your mind without thinking. Every time I would come across the word, it would resonate with my mind and soul. Some words do that to you, more so with writers since they have a peculiar relationship with words, poems, prose, and stories. Secondly, I've been part of the independent music scene for a while now, and with this being my first album, the word encapsulates my journey so far. It finally feels like I've arrived.

G: Can your music be described as Urdu-blues? How did you meld both?

SR: Urdu-blues is such a beautiful and unexpected gift to my music repertoire. It is merely a part of what I represent as an artist, but is definitely an unusual combination. I love scoring music for films as much as writing poetry. The whole concept of Urdu-blues has pushed me to play live way more than I usually would as a full-time film music composer. The idea is simple in its essence, which is contemporary blues music sung in Urdu, or classical Urdu-ghazal sung in a blues music form. Urdu-Hindi literature is what I grew up on. In fact, a normal morning would start with a Mehdi Hasan record, and would end with a classic R.D. Burman or a B.B. King album. When I started playing at a number of solo, intimate concerts, I stumbled upon the thought of melding blues and Urdu together, and here we are. Blues and ghazal

music have so much in common, on so many emotional and artistic levels, that the coming together of these two only felt natural to me. However, *Aamad* is not an Urdu-blues album, it falls more in the category of Urdu folk-rock and pop.

G: Heartbreak and longing seem to be a recurring theme throughout the album – did you draw from personal experience?

SR: Yes. The entire album was written over a decade. This wasn't the plan though. These songs that I've penned were never intended for a project, they come straight from my personal vault. The songs on *Aamad* are inspired by some of my relationships – some that worked and some that didn't. Some verses have been inspired by my travels as a vagabond, while the others have been coloured by my other expeditions. While it does centre around heartbreak and falling in and out of love, it's also about longing and being content.

G: Your lyrics read more like poetry, it's almost non-traditional in a sense. Were you apprehensive about it not being commercially viable?

SR: Two tracks on the album are spoken word poems or *nazm*. Every time I'd play a live concert, I'd keep my guitar aside to recite some of my poems; it soon became a part of my entire performance. I wanted to include this aspect on the album. I'm not going to lie – I was a bit apprehensive to have spoken word play a major role on the track list. But, I wanted to create that connect with my fans, and with anyone who would be listening to my music for the first time.

G: Is there a track on the album that resonates with the times?

SR: It would have to be *Hum Kaun Tha*. It's a poem written by the celebrated Urdu poet Jaun Elia and is a seven-minute-long celebration of self-discovery. My interpretation of it reminisces of a life lived, and a life about to come. **LI**

The album cover art for *Aamad*

GRAZIA GRAB

The latest buzz on your
favourite brands

MANE MATTERS

Say cheers to
glossy hair



Often, in the pursuit of thick, shiny tresses with an endless barrage of shampoos, conditioners, serums and sprays, more often than not we find ourselves wondering - is there a more straightforward solution? The answer is yes. All we need is a more holistic approach to taking care of the health of our hair. Healthy on the inside, shiny on the outside.

That's where Chicnutrix comes in – a beauty nutrition brand made by women and for women, created to address this pressing need. Believing that 'we are what we eat', The brand has launched Chicnutrix Bounce, a pack of effervescent tablets that are designed to not only decrease hairfall, but also increase hair density.

A dermatologically approved concoction made with Swiss Effervescent Technology, Bounce helps tame dry, rough, brittle hair and reduce split ends. It contains vitamins, amino acids, biotin and selenium, all of which are essential nutrients that promote nourishment and maintenance of hair follicles from the inside out.

All you have to do is pop one tablet in a glass of water, let it fizz and enjoy it like a raspberry-flavoured cooler. Apart from being delicious, these tablets are also vegan, sugar-free and totally non-toxic, safe to consume even by pregnant women without any worry of side-effects. Healthy hair on the inside and out, it doesn't get better than this.

Chicnutrix is available on www.chicnutrix.com and also on Nykaa.com and Amazon.in

WHERE TO FIND IT

I.I.I

www.ii-ii.in

ADIDAS ORIGINALS

shop.adidas.co.in

AEROPOSTALE

available at
aeropostale.nnnow.com

AKHL STUDIO

available at
www.perniaspopupshop.com

ALBERTA FERRETTI

www.albertaferretti.com

ALEXANDER MCQUEEN

www.alexandermcqueen.com

APPLE

www.apple.com

ARNOLD & SON

available at
www.rosethewatchbar.com

BALMAIN

www.balmain.com

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www.blaze-milano.com

BOTTEGA VENETA

www.bottogaveneta.com

BRUNELLO CUCINELLI

www.brunellocucinelli.com

CALVIN KLEIN

available at www.elitify.com

CASIO

www.casioindiashop.com

CATH KIDSTON

available at www.myntra.com

CHARLES & KEITH

www.charleskeith.com

CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN

www.christianlouboutin.com

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CROCS

www.shopcrocs.in

DHRUV KAPOOR

available at
www.perniaspopupshop.com

DSQUARED2

available at www.thecollective.in

EKA

available at www.ogaan.com

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GANNI

available at www.mytheresa.com

GUCCI

available at
www.matchesfashion.com

H&M

www2.hm.com

HACKETT LONDON

available at www.thecollective.in

JACK & JONES

www.jackjones.in

JIMMY CHOO

www.jimmychoo.com

KASSL EDITIONS

available at
www.net-a-porter.com

KORRA JEANS

www.korra.in

LEVI'S

www.levi.in

MAISON MARGIELA

available at
www.farfetech.com

MARKS & SPENCER

www.marksandspencer.in

MELISSA

www.melissaindia.com

METRO SHOES

www.metroshoes.net

MICHAEL KORS

available at luxury.tatacliq.com

MICH

available at www.mazeix.com

NIKE

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NM STUDIO

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O.P.I

www.nykaa.com

ONLY

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PÈRO

available at www.ogaan.com

POLO RALPH LAUREN

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RHEA PILLAI RASTOGI

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SALVATORE FERRAGAMO

available at www.elitify.com

SIMONE ROCHA

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www.swarovski.com

TED BAKER

available at www.thecollective.in

THE EPISODE

available at www.ensembleindia.com

THE LABEL LIFE

www.thelabellife.com

TOMMY HILFGER

available at www.myntra.com

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