

CHECK IT OUT

WEAVES, WEDDINGS and the wow factor

SAMUEL HOQUE WAXES ELOQUENT ON THE SEASON'S SUCCESS

Because it is Tourism Year, because we finally got the Jamdani patent we've been waiting for, because our local designers are beginning to get a larger share of international spotlight, all eyes have been on the Bangladeshi fashion industry this year, and what says "Bangladeshi" and "fashion" more than our native textiles?

With exciting new players entering the field, and seasoned hands upping their game, the handloom industry has seen some mind-boggling creative experimentation in recent shows, and we're just getting warmed up.

Fresh off the success of his showcase at the recently concluded International Weaver's Festival, menswear designer Samuel Hoque is off, all pistons firing as orders for the incipient wedding season come pouring in. Returning to Dhaka after a five-year hiatus, with two hit collections under the bag - one for each Eid - and the runaway success of his runway comeback with the IWF, Sam has every reason to be happy. We managed to squeeze in a quick chat with the man himself.

Okay, so you've been pulling out new inventions faster than Batman builds gadgets - from Eid ul Fitr's "scarf kurta" (panjabi with a built-in uttorio), to this season's hottest trend, the "T-cos" (printed coatees in T-shirt fabric), but people won't stop talking about the Weaver's Festival. Can you tell us a bit about your experiments there?

To begin with, using handloom fabrics for formal menswear was quite a challenge for me, as these fabrics require different techniques for cutting and draping, but once I started playing with the textiles, I totally fell in love with it, and went all out.

There was this look I did for Day 1 of the fest - lace pants to go with a sherwani, which was a real labour of love, and took under two weeks to complete. It was an unconventional choice because lace is not traditionally considered very masculine, but I let the cut and the fit speak for themselves.

On Day 2, I really went for the wow factor with hand-painted gamcha pattern on muslin. I was working with Tootli Rahman, and she wanted ensembles that stand out, so that's what I tried to deliver. It's on the final day, when we were working with Benarasi that I pulled out all the stops with tasselled coatees, split jackets, pops of colours and more. It was so much fun.

It certainly looked like fun. What was the whole fashion drama all about?

Theatre is art, fashion is art, and we wanted to start a conversation. You have the models, the music, the catwalk at every show, but we wanted to take it further, to really show the clothes in action, and so fashion drama was born.

Can we address the elephant in the room? The literal elephant in the room?



(Laughs). That was all Tootli Rahman. She wanted an entrance people would be talking about, so she opened our segment with a live elephant carrying in a model wearing a jamdani gown. And since it got everyone's attention, I can't complain.

Your current Autumn/Winter collection has a lot of bold prints and unusual motifs. As we transition into wedding season, what's your advice to men looking to stand out when they hit the festivities?

Firstly, don't follow trends. Go with what works for you; break the rules if necessary, but be you. Secondly, your skin colour and size has nothing to do with the colours you wear, so don't worry about taking chances. Finally, have fun, and experiment.

By Fatima Hussain

Photo: Sam H



#BeautyAtEveryAge

The Age Dilemma in Women of Bangladesh

Dr. Mahbuba Nasreen, Director of Institute of Disaster Management and Vulnerability Studies at the University of Dhaka, has almost 30 years worth of expertise in research concerning gender, social inclusion and indigenous women. We sat down with her after the Dove "How Old Are You?" roundtable discussion, jointly organised by The Daily Star and Dove on the 18th of October, to ask why women are so apprehensive about revealing their age. And this led to an interesting discussion about how the question of age poses its own set of unique challenges for the women in Bangladesh.

First of all, age-anxiety is not a phenomenon that exists across all demographics. While urban women might be unwilling to answer this question, rural women are altogether unaware about their real age. "Rural women are oftentimes so ignorant of their health and nutritional needs that they end up looking older than they actually are. They also lack access to mass media outlets", says Dr. Nasreen. Whereas every time an urban woman opens a magazine, newspaper or television, she is bombarded with airbrushed images of young models advertising different anti-aging treatments and advice columns on how to look younger. Criticism from friends and family about their "dwindling good looks" also adds to their stigma.

Women on the verge of menopause suffer the most in this regard, oftentimes experiencing depression and vertigo because of the fear that their beauty is beyond them. Dr Nasreen elaborates, "In many western countries we will see entire support systems dedicated for helping women undergoing menopause to resolve their age-anxieties. But menopause is a topic that is hardly ever addressed in Bangladesh. Those of us who do understand menopause know that it does not affect our sex appeal." Another popular myth that needs to be debunked is that women ought to marry men who are much older in order to feel young and beautiful in the long term. Because apparently, "men grow younger while women grow much older". Instead what has been shown to be correct is that libido levels remain more or less constant in women but they often take a turn for the worse in older men", she explains.

Patriarchy uses the people around us to insinuate how the world always favours younger women; it can be through the mother who tells us to get married "while there is still time", or the husband who tells us to lose weight after we've given birth or the friend who buys us anti-aging creams for our birthdays. Whereas it is perfectly acceptable to everyone that men shouldn't need to worry about their aging good looks.

In conclusion Dr Nasreen states, "Beauty that is ageless comes from our ability to share laughter with people of all ages. Women have to overcome many hurdles and difficulties throughout their lives, but if at the end of the day they still choose to celebrate the silver linings then that is all they need to feel young."

By Antara Islam

Photo: Rashed Shumon



How Old are You?

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