

WOW! chats with Hyderabad-based designers **Gaurang Shah**, **Archana Rao**, **Varun Chakkilam** and **Arvind Ampula** about their latest collections which were unveiled at the 2024 Lakmé Fashion Week held at the Jio World Convention Centre in Mumbai last month

Representing Hyderabad!

GAURANG SHAH

Self-taught, **Gaurang Shah** is a national award-winning designer with a passion for highlighting the beauty of Indian textiles in his work and putting up on a pedestal the artisans he has interacted and collaborated with across India for the past 40 years. In the process of transforming textile aesthetics, he has made weavers financially independent, and by so doing managed to attract a whole new generation of weavers.

He recently depicted grace and sophistication in his collection, *Gulal*, which was the ultimate showstopper at his presentation at the 2024 Lakmé Fashion Week. The collection shone a light on 40 *jamdani*, jacquard and dobby textiles that incorporated ten saris and 30 *lehengas* in varied hues of pink. "The versatile color '*Gulal*' stands for purity, sincerity, and peace and is worn particularly in the Spring season of *Phagun*," shares Gaurang Shah of the collection that took over two years to come to fruition.

The lineup for *Gulal* included a *lehenga* with *Patan patola* and *Parsi gara* embroidery, which was in turn accompanied by a handwoven crepe silk *dupatta* sourced from Karnataka. Another was a *Patan patola dupatta* paired with a *lehenga* featuring *Kota jamdani* and a Banaras silk border. The saris and *lehengas* were made richer with embroidery styles like *mochi*, *Parsi gara*, *kasuti*, *Kashmiri*, and *Kutchi*. Furthermore, rare embroideries like *maraudi* from Ahmedabad and *petit point* from Kerala were highlighted.

When asked what it feels like to be back at Lakmé Fashion Week, Gaurang tells us, "This is the 22nd year at the Lakmé Fashion Week. With each passing year, I have witnessed my creative boundaries expand, backed by the platform's support and appreciation for Indian textiles. It has been a privilege to showcase the diverse weaves of India and garner recognition for our efforts in preserving and promoting our heritage."



VARUN CHAKKILAM

Designer **Varun Chakkilam** finds inspiration for his designs in, as his eponymous label states: luxury, aristocracy, and ornateness. An admirer of unconventional artistry, Varun brings his own unique style to bridal and fusion wear. Understated, graceful, and playful are a few words that can be used to describe his work.

At the LFW, Varun presented *Lenora*, a collection that represents splendor and opulence with a color palette that ranges from pristine whites to fiery coppers. The collection creates an aura of refined elegance that effortlessly blends classical shapes with botanical details and sumptuous fabrics.

"Through this collection, I could strike the perfect balance between age-old techniques and modern silhouettes, which was quite different from my previous collections. It was truly astonishing to see how beautifully it worked out," Varun shares of the collection he has been working on with his team for three months.

Actress Sara Ali Khan turned showstopper for the label at the presentation. Discussing his collaboration with her for LFW, an excited Varun declares, "She is the perfect muse to walk the ramp for this collection because, to us, she represents light, purity, and creativity. Her personality is in absolute sync with our collection's inspiration."



In keeping with the collection *Lenora*, below are a few trends to look out for this season according to **Varun Chakkilam**:

1. Botanical Embellishments
2. Sumptuous Fabrics
3. Classic Contours
4. Fiery Coppers and Earthy Browns tone
5. Plush Textures



VIKA BY ARVIND AMPULA

"Vika by Arvind Ampula offers a comprehensive shopping destination, catering to everything from everyday attire to the complete wedding wardrobe for brides, bridesmaids, grooms, groomsmen, children, and the entire family," explains Arvind Ampula, introducing the wide-ranging appeal of his signature brand.

Arvind was among the Hyderabad designers to unveil his latest collection at the recently concluded Lakmé Fashion Week. The collection *Whispers of Empires* honored Indian and Persian cultures and showcased menswear like *Jodhpuri* jackets, *kurta*s, *sherwanis* and *bundies*. For women, they incorporated bridal wear alongside lace and botanical *lehenga*, *dupattas*, *choli*, *shararas* and *kurta*s, with actress Fatima Sana Shaikh closing the show in a purple floral *lehenga*.

"The collection has a combination of new colors and new techniques of work to look forward to, and all the motifs are new and fresh," Arvind elaborates. When asked to share his thoughts on LFW being an enormous stage for designers to showcase their work, he concludes by saying, "To prove the worth of a designer in the fashion industry, LFW is the highest platform on a national level, and it works as the foundation for the brand's global outreach."



ARCHANA RAO

NIFT graduate and national award-winning designer **Archana Rao** founded her label in 2011 and first arrived on the fashion scene under the gen-next category at the Lakmé Fashion Week. She drew inspiration for her work from multicultural traditions and everything vintage. Over time, she went on to carve out a niche for herself with an aesthetic that is, as her label suggests, a balance between structure and feminine sophistication.

Archana has been showcasing her work at Fashion Week for over a decade now and assures us that the experience is different every time. Going into detail about the fashion week process she shares, "The entire process - from sketching out the ideas, and watching it take shape in the form of garments, meeting the LFW Team in person, model fitting sessions, meeting buyers, stylists, and editors and walking them through our collection, greeting our clients personally and the feeling of being present in the moment is priceless."

Having evolved as a designer, Archana now believes to have more of a 'less is more' concept in mind when designing pieces. Being feminine, minimalist, yet impactful seems to be the approach. This can be seen in her latest collection titled *Sun and Moon* which was unveiled at the LFW '24. The collection highlights the stark differences between the Sun and the Moon while also recognizing the harmony between them. "This collection is meticulously embellished with Swarovski crystals and intricate appliques. Floral embroideries, adorned with delicate pearls, serve as a nod to our brand's signature aesthetic, adding a touch of timeless femininity to every ensemble," Archana elaborates.

With this collection, Archana has ventured out of her comfort zone while remaining true to herself and her brand. When asked what she would like people to take away from the collection, Archana ends by sharing, "I would love to see people experiment with my pieces and make it their own. Since this collection is so minimal and strong, I think people will have fun trying power dressing." ■ IPSHITA

