

Fashion Week

Are we suffering
from fashion
show fatigue?

BY PRITI SALIAN



KOMAL SOOD LFW SUMMER RESORT 2013 SHOW

The fashion industry has gone from a handful of staple shows — Milan Fashion Week, New York Fashion Week and Paris Fashion Week — to every region hosting its own. But are fashion designers, buyers and the media participating? We spoke with industry A-listers to find out how regional fashion weeks are affecting their business.

Producing a Show is Expensive

“Producing a show can cost a designer anywhere from \$3,000 to \$13,000 CDN,” says designer Pria Kataaria Puri, who’s been in the business for 16 years and has dressed glamour queens Madonna, Paris Hilton and Princess Françoise. “This includes money expended on models, choreographers, makeup, set designing and production,” she adds.

To participate in Toronto’s World MasterCard Fashion Week, the cheapest time slot starts at around \$7,000 CDN. “Depending on the designer, the cost of making a collection of an average of 30

complete outfits can be anywhere from \$17,000 to \$34,000 CDN. The main cost is fabric, developing embellishments and prints, and of course, producing the samples (which includes cost of labour), finishing, overheads like sourcing, and things that are discarded,” says designer Varun Bahl, whose creations are available in more than 40 stores across Italy and Spain.

But the investment isn’t only monetary. “If I talk about my shows, a lot of time and effort is invested in creating a high-voltage Manish Arora show that gives the audience an experience to take home,” says ace designer Manish Arora, regarded by many as the John Galliano of India.

Are Two Weeks Stronger Than Many?

The Wills Lifestyle India Fashion Week, organized by the Fashion Design Council of India, and the Lakmé Fashion Week run twice a year and are major trade events for Indian fashion designers. In the past few years, India has also hosted regional fashion weeks in Bangalore, Chandigarh, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Jaipur and Pune, in addition to International Fashion Week, India International Jewellery Week and India Kids Fashion Week.

“Most designers make it a point to attend WIFW and LFW to show solidarity among the fashion fraternity,” says designer Nachiket Barve, winner of the Young Fashion Entrepreneur of the Year award in 2010. Though Barve usually attends both WIFW and LFW, he has stayed away from the regional fashion weeks. “If the media and the buyers remain the same everywhere, it doesn’t make sense to attend all fashion weeks.”

Similarly, other countries are dealing with a widespread eagerness for each city to host its own show. In addition to the Toronto Fashion Week mainstay, in Canada, Montreal, Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary and the Atlantic cities have all begun regularly allotting two weeks each year for runway shows. “Exposure of all kinds is great for emerging and consolidated designers,” says top Toronto-based stylist Luis Zulayhka. “Toronto Fashion Week is certainly a major platform for designers. However, not every designer, especially the up and coming, can afford to be a part of it.”

Do Too Many Fashion Weeks Reduce the Number of Buyers?

“A focused buyer knows exactly where to be at a given point in time,” says Anjali Sharma, the designer behind leading studio French Curve. “Buyers also know which designers suit their store’s aesthetics, and travel mostly to the city for the fashion week where their most-favoured designers showcase,” Bahl adds. “It’s obvious that having one consolidated fashion week will indeed result in better media coverage and attract buyers who are serious about investing in Indian designers. But even

then, the attendance of a crowd of buyers may not guarantee success.”

According to Zulayhka, designers showcasing in the earlier time slots are usually showcasing for the first time, or they’re newbies, which leads to a lack of media coverage and buyers. “I have heard people in the industry say that if you are not a designer showcasing after 5:00 p.m., you might not be very good,” he adds.

There’s No Need to Tell the Story on the Runway Anymore

Time and financial constraints are just a couple things that keep designers from participating in fashion weeks, but designers are finding ways to make up for those difficulties. Designers Gaurav Gupta and Barve didn’t show at WIFW A/W 2013. “A collection may make more sense if it is preceded by a show,” Barve explains. “However, whether you show or don’t, business takes place regardless.”

There are also designers who have replaced shows with videos and presentations, while others wouldn’t give up showcasing their work for anything. “I have had heartwarming responses from people right after my shows that have touched me emotionally. So I definitely prefer live shows,” says Arora. Zulayhka sees the benefits of intimate, smaller-scale presentations: “A huge production does not mean a full house or superb sales,” he says. “I consider privé shows to be a more efficient approach, and would definitely suggest it to all up and coming talent.”

Fashion previews at art galleries and restaurants aren’t uncommon today. Such private previews not only eliminate competition but also bring down costs. “They add a personal touch to the event where visitors can interact with each other and the designer as well,” says designer Rajat Tangri.

But while other avenues of showcasing can be a fun, out-of-the-box presentation, for a designer, there’s nothing in the world that can replace the pride of showcasing a collection at a fashion week. “No matter how much you live stream a show, the joy of seeing clothes in motion two feet away from you is unparalleled,” Barve says. ä

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