

NOTICED

Homegrown Fashion

Independent Asian designers are finding a warm welcome in Singapore, with a growing number of boutiques that embrace emerging talent and a locally minded aesthetic. By Diana Hubbell

Let's just come right out and say it: Singapore is one stylish city. Take a stroll down the glitzy sidewalks of Orchard Road and you'll invariably spy businessmen and women decked out in the latest looks from the catwalks of Milan, Paris and New York. In recent years though, the city-state's fashionistas have begun to gravitate away from the ubiquitous international luxury brands and concentrate more on emerging, regional labels. Smaller boutiques are cropping up, giving up- and-coming Asian designers a chance to shine.

"I have a soft spot for the underdogs, so I am always trying to discover and showcase new talents," says Apsara Oswell, owner and curator of the newly opened **MYthology** (my-thology.com), a boutique on Club Street showcasing a carefully selected range of Asian designers, like **Dresstronomy** (dresstronomy.com), with signature items such as flirty sundresses and versatile gowns, and **Eina Ahluwalia**, (einaahluwalia.com) with intricately wrought, conceptual bracelets and bangles. "Though Singaporeans are usually so well turned out, I do feel that there is a tendency to play it safe

in terms of clothing. It would be fun to see more experimental stuff around here."

She's certainly not the only one who thinks so. Last May's design extravaganza, the Blueprint Trade Show, saw some pretty funky fashions, including local standouts like **Mae Pang's** (mae-pang.com) futuristic pieces and **Ong Shunmugam's** (ongshunmugam.com) reinterpretations of women's garments like saris, *samfus* and *kebayas*.

One particular scene-stealer from the Trade Show available at MYthology is **TOTON** (totonthelabel.com), the eponymous label of Indonesian model-turned-designer Toton Nugroho. Launched in Singapore last season, his brand is already generating serious buzz for its sleek silhouettes and fiercely feminine accessories. The designer's artful knack for weaving traditional Javanese motifs into his contemporary designs has garnered acclaim from critics across the globe. From the meticulously detailed embroidery to the high collars, his cultural heritage makes its way into each and every design.



"I'm always drawing inspiration from the richness of the culture of Indonesia. I tried to translate that into the collection by reworking what are considered traditional or ethnic shapes, crafts and fabrics," Toton says.

This re-imagining of classic regional styles is piquing interest within the local fashion scene. Style blogs like bonjoursingapore.com have praised Toton for being utterly unique and still "maintaining the elegance" while couturetroopers.com described his work as "exquisite, exotic."

As Apsara points out, "We have the advantage of being a multicultural country, and hence have an immense potential to develop eclectic tastes in fashion."✦



From top: Inside MYthology; a Dresstronomy creation; jewelry by Eina Ahluwalia.



COURTESY OF MYTHOLOGY



From top: Bracelet from Eina Ahluwalia's Byzantine collection; an Indonesian-inspired dress by TOTON; at the MYthology boutique.



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