



Fashion

Unsung home-grown heroes of the catwalk

CUSTO AND ZARA ARE SPAIN'S BIGGEST FASHION EXPORTS. BUT OUR FASHION CORRESPONDENT EXPLAINS WHO TO LOOK OUT FOR IF YOU REALLY WANT TO FIND THE STARS OF SPANISH DESIGN

■ Those designers who listen to their individual muses, create for the pleasure of it, and are less concerned about media attention continue to be Spain's well-kept secrets

MARTA WENDLINGER

● When you think about Spanish fashion, who tends to come to mind? In all likelihood, it's Custo or Zara.

Custo Barcelona, formed by the brothers Custodio and David Dalmau, started out designing t-shirts in the early 80s and gained celebrity status in recent years much like the Catalan culinary star Ferran Adrià.

And in the High Street, Zara, is one of the largest chains in Spain, with close to 900 stores in 60 countries, making millions of sales each year.

Amancio Ortega, owner of Inditex (the empire of seven brand names including Pull and Bear, Massimo Dutti, Bershka, Stradivarius, Oysho and Kiddy's Class) is the richest man in Spain and number 23rd in the world with a net fortune put at € 10.4 billion, according to Forbes magazine.

But Spanish fashion today is so much more.

Needless to say, status and money does not always equal style and merit. It often seems as if the designers with the best marketing strategy and biggest bucks get the most attention.

Some, like Antonio Miro make news headlines by designing everything, from fragrances to bed sheets, clothes, and even bathroom taps; others are merely recognised for using standard motifs like hearts, flowers, and bright colours like yellow, red, and fuchsia as is Agatha Ruiz de la Prada.

New designers like David Delfin gain notoriety because of the



Images from the Passarel.la Gaudí fashion show held this year in Barcelona. Designs by Lydia Delgado (above), Josep Font (right) and Miriam Ocariz (below)



shock value of their collections. It was Delfin whose recent collection had models completely covered by veils. This angered many, as at the same time women under the Taliban regime were being repressed and assaulted on a daily basis.

During his last collection for the Autumn/Winter 2006-2007, Delfin featured designs reminiscent of Nazi uniforms. The reaction was predictable.

But what about those designers who listen to their individual muses, create for the

pleasure of it, and are less concerned about media attention? They continue to be Spain's well-kept secrets. Throughout the country, with over 50 fashion schools from Galicia to Andalusia, the Basque Country, Catalonia and Madrid, Spanish designers are creating and selling their collections in and outside of their country.

A few interesting designers, perhaps not as well known, but worth mentioning are Josep Font (who consistently designs ultra-feminine collections), Lydia Delgado (who is widely respected for her chic and sensual designs), Miriam Ocariz (whose inventive prints are sought after all over Spain), Juana Martin,

(the first Gypsy designer who reinterprets traditional flamenco dress), Roberto Diz (who continues to experiment with his unique style), Amaya Arzuaga (who uses classic structures to produce innovative garments), and lastly Hannibal Laguna (who is both multi-talented and dynamic, and who manages to create both women's and bridal wear collections on a regular, seasonal basis).

The Spanish fashion experience is about far more than rushing off to the nearest Zara. Spare time for the small fashion boutiques along the way.

I'm sure you'll be pleasantly surprised to find unique, and in many cases, one-of-a-kind pieces, reasonably priced that you may have missed otherwise.

This article is reproduced courtesy of Expatica (www.expatica.com) which is a website providing news and information for expatriates in Spain.

STORE REVIEW

No harm in window shopping

● I was always curious about BEL, a discrete yet elegant store (two actually - one for women and one for men) on Passeig de Gràcia in Barcelona near Gran Via, right across from the enormously trendy chain store Zara.

The display windows feature a sort of high-end LL Bean style, typical of Connecticut or Boston in the US. I would never have ex-

pected this type of style—so classical and traditional—here in Barcelona.

I've never seen anyone walk in, but the day I wrote this article, others did stop to look in the windows, though no one ventured in. I can only assume they were taken aback with the high prices: a simple linen sleeveless blouse for €500, a standard pair

of black trousers €250, a linen jacket €1,000, a cotton t-shirt €200, and the simplest linen bag ever, which actually reminded me of a paper shopping bag, was going for an incredible €220. The men's clothes were similarly priced and reflected that same conservative and "stiff upper lip" style.

But the more I stood outside

observing, the more people actually walked in. Some came out rather quickly, but others lingered inside. I noticed lots of tourists looking - tourists with "money", as BEL doesn't charge the standard 16% IVA; it's all duty-free.

As you might have imagined, customers have to ring the bell to enter and "customer service" actually means something. The salesperson greeted me with a smile and asked if there was any-

thing she could help me with... definitely not a typical attitude here. Most of the time in Spanish stores salespeople seem bothered by your presence and even more upset if you ask for their help.

Linens, silks, cottons... subdued colours and classical designs, excellent quality fabrics and beautiful store details, bouquets of flowers everywhere, and what all stores of this kind have... attitude, something I could have done without.

Marta Wendlinger / www.onezonefashion.com