

NEXT GENERATION

PRABAL GURUNG IS THE FASHION WORLD'S INTERNATIONAL
MAN OF MYSTERY

Prabal Gurung has had the kind of year most fashion designers spend their entire careers dreaming about. In February, after two seasons of low-key presentations, he showed his eponymous collection on the runway for the first time. He dressed high-powered women and leading ladies such as Oprah Winfrey, Demi Moore, Zoe Saldana and Michelle Obama — arguably the woman with the most scrutinized wardrobe in the world. He was the recipient of the 2010 Ecco Domani Fashion Fund Award, nominated for the 2010 CFDA Swarovski Award for Womenswear, invited to be among the first 12 tenants at the CFDA Fashion Incubator, and selected as a finalist for the 2010 CFDA/Vogue Fashion Fund award (the winner of the \$200,000 top prize will be announced November 15).

"I'm a product of love from the industry," says Gurung. "The fashion industry has been so good to me, so nurturing, and that's all I've ever wanted."

The Singapore-born, Nepal-raised designer always wanted to be involved in fashion. In his formative years, Gurung was inspired by Diana Vreeland's work for *Harper's Bazaar*, fashion shoots by Helmut Newton and Richard Avedon, Coco Chanel and, above all, Yves Saint Laurent.

Gurung eventually went on to study fashion in India at New Delhi's National Institute of Fashion Technology and then worked in the Indian fashion industry before deciding to make the ultimate leap in pursuing his dream: moving to New York City, the center of the fashion world.

"I was almost ready to start my own collection in India," Gurung says, "but then I was like, you know what? Let me try. Let me try New York and see what happens. If it's a mistake, it's mine, and at least I gave it a shot."

The move wasn't a mistake.

Gurung arrived in New York in 1999, enrolled at Parsons, and started interning with Donna Karan. In his first year at Parsons, he won the "Best Designer" title at the annual Parsons vs. FIT competition, where Cynthia Rowley acted as a judge — she immediately offered Gurung a job. A few years later, Gurung received a call from Bill Blass, where he served as design director for five years before leaving to launch his own collection.

Gurung, who has remained remarkably humble in the face of such meteoric success, says, "Being the 'second guy' for such a long time ... and finally getting to do your own stuff, which I've always wanted

to do — that's all I've strived for, all I've trained myself for all these years — I'm just happy that I'm able to do this."

His "own stuff" is a mix of gorgeous cocktail dresses, evening gowns, and, with his fall 2010 collection, impeccably tailored sportswear. The white and black colorblocked cashmere coat, the pants with elongating, curvilinear seams and a hooded jacket with zip details are three of the key pieces in the collection, all inspired by some rather unusual neighbors.

"I live across from the Hell's Angels," Gurung says, and the motorcycle gang's influence is felt throughout the fall collection. "It was literally the idea of speed, motion and the graphic element of motocross [that inspired the collection]," he says.

"It was also very much the time we are living in now," he continues. "I was interested with the way we're living. With technology and the way information gets passed, everything is about speed, everything is instant."

Hell's Angels and the fast pace of the digital world aside, Gurung says his collections always boil down to the particular type of woman he designs for.

"I always say she's the thinking man's sex symbol. A beautiful woman, obviously, but I would say more intelligent," he says. "A beautiful woman is a beautiful woman, but a beautiful woman with a brain is an absolutely lethal combination."

prabalgurung.com





photography by Kevin Sturman