



**THE GLITTERATI**  
The Singapore show put the best of Asian designs on display.

IT WAS QUITE A FEAT to bring together the cream of Asian designers in a couture week that managed to incorporate a dedicated Japanese couture evening as well as a French one. "Both cities are enjoying their influential fashion power with their inspiration and sense of new fashion," noted veteran Japanese designer Yumi Katsura.

Asian design luminaries like Guo Pei from Beijing, Michael Cinco from the Philippines, Sebastian Gunawan from Indonesia, Lie Sang Bong from Korea, Vatit Itthi from Thailand and Frederick Lee from Singapore, all design leaders in their homelands, were a part of this fashion event. And Fashion Week 2013, presented by The Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands, organized by FIDÉ Fashion Weeks, brought them together in October 2013.

The French couture contingent was represented by presentations from Alexis Mabille, On Aura Tout Vu, Stéphane Rolland and Julien Fournié. "I think it's the environment we've created — there is a sense of camaraderie. We very purposefully themed different nights per country so the Japanese would really rally around one another and help support them. I think it's nice to see that backstage and translated onto front rows," said Frank Cintamani, chairman and founder of FIDÉ Fashion Weeks.

With Forbes.com reporting that Tokyo already famed for its street fashion, hosts almost 40 percent of the world's top fashion retailers, it comes as no surprise that an entire evening was also dedicated to Japanese designers. "Fashion in Paris influences women of all generations while in Japan it is rather the younger generation now. I think there are no more boundaries in fashion and there is a globalisation of the fashion culture," according to Kenzo Takada, founder of the fashion house Kenzo.

Katsura explains that the Japanese fashion industry is different from that of France or Italy. "In Japan we have less support for our fashion industry from the government, as nationals are paying less attention to fashion design in Japan than in France and Italy. It is also very important to have more Japanese 'world fashion fames' such as Issey Miyake, Kenzo Takada, Comme des Garçons (Rei



## Fashion Flash

# O Couture!

A couture extravaganza took place in Singapore featuring the best in Asian design talent, heralding reappearances by French couturiers and forming a new federation.

BY ALEXANDRA KOHUT-COLE

Kawakubo), and Yohji Yamamoto."

Veteran avant-garde designer Junko Koshino, who charts Azzedine Alaïa as her biggest inspiration, mixed up a retrospective showcase with designs for her new collection in a fusion of fabrics spanning latex and leather to silk and organza. She presented silk parachute capes that looked as if they had a life of their own, ready to take off. "The elaborate material which is used for haute couture is easy to use, such as the silk of the Silk Road," says Koshino. With a theme of Japanese spirit, the collection was about "translating Japan's own history and tradition into today's modernism, which is contemporary, high-quality and chic."

Originally from Osaka, Koshino showed her collections in Paris for 22 long years until 2000. The Tony Award nominee for her designs for the Broadway musical "Pacific Overtures" is renowned for her costume designs for operas such as "Madame Butterfly" and "The Magic Flute." And she has recently been commissioned to design Myanmar's national team uniforms. She is proud to show in Singapore, Koshino says. "It does not matter about the size of a country, it is just important [that they] understand."

Yoshiki Hishinuma meticulously painted the flora and fauna themes on an ultra feminine assemblage of silks and chiffons by hand. Hishinuma, from Sendai City, honed his skills at the Miyake Design Studio, specializing mainly in stage costume. In the 1980s he produced unique collections that he named "Kite Clothes" and "Air Clothes." He began showing his eponymous women's clothing line in Paris in 1992 and was awarded the Mainichi Prize for Fashion in 1996.

Keita Maruyama's opulent psychedelic play on the cheongsam contrasted with the cute styling of tiny cardigans, 50s skirts and swinging ponytails and the simplicity of a silk bomber jacket bringing the fragile powder blue embroidered train of its dress beneath. Maruyama debuted his first collection in Tokyo in 1994, winning the Mainichi Fashion Grand Prix New Face Award and



**CONTRASTING STYLES**  
 Right: Designer Katsura's show of sparkling kimono in soft greys and pinks. Far right: Maruyama walks the catwalk with his creations.



**OPULENT PSYCHEDELIA**  
 Clockwise from right: Junko Koshino takes a bow; Yoshiaki Hishinuma painstakingly handpainted the flora and fauna on fragile silks and chiffons; the designer Hishinuma with a model.

Shiseido Sponsorship Award in 1996. In 1997 he started showing his designs in Paris.

Yumi Katsura took the audience on a roller coaster of contrasting styles. The vibe was electric and her energy and passion shone through in the clothes. From light cocktail frocks to exquisitely detailed gowns and a plethora of the deliciously elaborate fairytale wedding dresses she is known for, her lively spirit and humor shone through as she waved two tiny Singapore flags to a standing ovation.

The show switched gears seamlessly, holding the audience's attention in a viselike grip, and the gem of her show was a glittering jeweled kimono of soft greys and pinks with two orange flowers adorning either side.

Katsura describes her philosophy: "I placed importance on traditional designs that have survived generations because of their universal value. So, I showcased new designs and added my contemporary interpretation to traditional ones."

At 85, Katsura is one of Japan's most prolific designers, and her wedding dresses are considered modern masterpieces. In 1981, Katsura expanded her business into the US, France, and the UK. In 1988, the Yumi Katsura Bridal Museum was established in Kobe and today there is a Yumi Katsura Bridal House New York on Madison Avenue in New York City. Katsura is the first Asian member of the Camera Nazionale Della Moda Italiana, and she even designed a vestment for Pope John Paul II.

Katsura finds showing in Singapore important, as Asia as a whole is represented. "The couture show in Singapore was really significant and a meaningful challenge for the Asian fashion industry as we haven't had such occasions so far. I have been insisting that Tokyo should take responsibility for this role of being a fashion pioneer in Asia."

With such a high caliber of diverse designers from so many countries around the world, the week was one of couture-inspired creativity, drama and dreams. It also witnessed the inauguration of the Asian Couture Federation (ACF).

"Through the activities of the ACF, we find talented designers in Asia and provide chances [for them] to appeal to the world — creative activities which merge Eastern culture and design with that

of Western," says Katsura.

The new body will watch over and nurture new designers, as does the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture in Paris and the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) in New York. The ACF will affect Asian fashion in the future and, as Junko Koshino puts it, "it will show the importance of manufacturing — the importance of our hands. It will tell the real story from Asia." This, without a doubt, is positive not just for Asian couture but couture globally. ■