

Natalya Dametkina

Center for Executive Education (CEE) student, Natalya Dametkina, gave hotel uniforms a new lease of life with her designs – showcased in the "Corporate Catwalk" at the Dubai Hotel Show in July. She won first prize and an internship, which commences this month, with a local designer. *Campus Journal* spoke to Natalya about her design aspirations.

Where it all began

My mother has incredible taste and she always dressed me in her own designs – mostly handmade – embroidered clothing, knit-wear, even hand-stitched fur coats. Sometimes, I refused to go to kindergarten, just because I didn't have a new dress to impress. So I got "spoiled" by fashion at a young age. And, of course, I liked to dress my dolls when I was growing up.

Inspiring forces

Our teacher, Dimple Chandavar at CEE, usually gets some information via e-mail about competitions and encourages us to participate. I work full-time at a hotel as a receptionist and the issue of uniforms is very close to my heart. I hear from my colleagues that they would prefer to wear what is comfortable. I am a working student. Because I already knew the demands of working at a hotel, I could save some time. My designs were based on what I would ideally like to wear and what I would ideally like my colleagues to wear.

The Hotel Show has already been held for a few years at the Dubai Exhibition Center. This year, the organizers wanted to spice it up with a "Corporate Catwalk." Over three days, different companies presented their uniforms on the catwalk and there was the competition amongst students for the best uniform design.

There were many departments of the hotel to choose from – the front office, security, fine dining, coffee shop and spa – and we were required to choose at least three departments and to provide sketch drawings of uniforms for both the sexes. The winning design would be produced by the sponsoring company, Ronai. Ronai is a company that supplies uniforms and other catering equipment to hotels. The participants' creations were displayed on the stands, so that exhibitors and visitors could have a look. I believe there were about nine participants.



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Winning gold

I chose to design uniforms for the reception, fine dining and security departments for both the sexes. We were not given any instructions. So I thought about what I would like to wear and what I would like my colleagues to wear. Mostly, in Dubai, they use a lot of embellishments such as embroidery and colors. I decided to use it as well, but with more conservative colors, since the wearers will still be at work. Small details like red flowers or a little embroidery go very far to make them a little interesting. I also thought pants would be more comfortable than skirts, which was what I noticed at my place of work.

I went on the first day of the exhibition to see the stands. I was both nervous and excited at the same time. I took some pictures and of course, checked out my competitors. On the second day, my name was announced as the winner and I finally saw my creation on a model. I had mixed feelings, because I wanted to check all the details of the uniform first and then go on stage with it. But in reality, I didn't have time to even look at the uniform I had designed for female receptionists, which the sponsor had selected to make and exhibit for the show. I think the scariest moment was when I had my first interview ever after the winner was announced. I wasn't prepared at all.

My prizes were a week-long internship with a designer at the Ronai company which designs hotel uniforms, a certificate and a dinner for two – which I haven't used yet – at the JW Marriott.

Simple ambitions

In the near future, I see myself completing my week-long internship award first, then completing my studies in February and participating in more competitions. Eventually, I hope to work as a designer and start a family in Dubai.

Words of wisdom

I don't think I'm in a position to advise other aspiring designers. I think I should be the one receiving advice! I just wish them inspiration and the luck to find their muses. Remember, "yesterday" is history, "tomorrow" is a mystery and "today" is a gift. (From the *Kung Fu Panda* movie.) ☺

