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Megan Hirons/Gulf News  
Flowers were used in a manner of different ways.

**Hot young talent**

By Jyoti Kalsi, Gulf News Report  
Published: April 28, 2008, 00:05

The competition, which is in its ninth edition this year, attracted over 300 participants in both the amateur designer and student designer categories. Ten finalists from each category were invited to present their creations on the runway at the Dubai International Exhibition Centre on Saturday.

The challenge for the participants this year was to create a wedding gown based on the theme, "the art of being intimate". And their unique and interesting interpretations proved that there is a lot of talent and potential among young designers living in the UAE.

The panel of judges included Ghania Azzam, fashion editor of Zahrat Al Khaleej magazine, fashion photographer Hussain Jain, Mohammad Bahraimi, designer and owner of Eve 'n' Black Abayas, Melanie Penny, fashion and beauty director of OK! Middle East magazine and Bansri Gangwani, creative service centre manager, Swarovski Middle East. They assessed the creations on several criteria including concept, design, technique, quality and finish, and innovative use of crystallised Swarovski elements.

First on the ramp were the amateur designers, followed by students from UAE-based fashion institutes Mahe Manipal, French Fashion University Esmod, Preston University, Pearl Design Centre and Centre for Executive Education. cultural mix

The judges chose Helen O' Connor's wedding gown featuring a broad textured, crystal-encrusted shoulder piece with outstretched metallic branches as the winner in the amateur designer's category.

The South African works as a floral designer in Dubai and has no formal training in fashion design. "I wanted to create something organic with graphic

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lines and lots of detailing. The idea was to do a dramatic fantasy piece that would make an impact on stage and I learnt the nuances of tailoring as I went along," she said.

Mona Badawi, a Sudanese marketing professional based in Abu Dhabi, was the runner-up in this category. Her white wedding gown was beautifully embellished with traditional Arabic and Indian embroidery, paisley motifs and words from a romantic Arabic poem in gold thread.

"I took inspiration from traditional Emirati garments and the architecture of the Bastakiya area. My design is a combination of Arabic and Indian culture," said Badawi. "Winning this award has encouraged me to take up my hobby as a profession," she added.

Aisha Chaudhary, a final year fashion design student from the Centre for Executive Education, was the winner in the student category, while Selina Farooqui, a first-year student from Esmod was the runner-up.

#### **'Hide and seek'**

Chaudhary's cream, off-the-shoulder gown with translucent gauze covering the midriff had a frilled pink layer concealed underneath.

"I wanted to play on the notion of hide and seek as part of being intimate," said the young aspiring designer. "My teachers and parents helped me in developing my concept and choosing the fabrics for my gown, but I created the whole outfit with my own hands," said the proud winner from Pakistan.

Farooqui's pleated silk gown with layers of flounced net on the back and coloured fabric flowers at the waist reflected her love of nature. "I interpreted intimacy through flowers. The roses symbolise passion, the orchids represent delicate beauty and lilacs stand for first love. The arrangement of the crystals on my gown reflects a cascading waterfall," said the youngster from India. "I have recently moved to Dubai and this is my very first time at this event. I made the dress myself with no outside help and it is really exciting to win," she said.

The Swarovski Innovation Award for 2008 went to Joseph Lalongisip for his multi-layered white and coral pink gown studded with over 1,000 Swarovski crystals teamed with a chiffon parasol with attached veil that transformed into a bridal bouquet when closed.

#### **'Overwhelming'**

"This is overwhelming and I cannot believe it," said the accountant from the Philippines, who works at a tailoring shop in Dubai. "I have no formal training in design but I have learnt by watching my parents who are in this business. I came to Dubai to pursue my dream and winning this prize is my big chance to become a fashion designer," he said.

All the winners received crystal trophies, certificates and gift vouchers from Swarovski. Lalongisip's prize also includes a one-year internship at Swarovski Middle East.

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