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**This Mumbai atelier is the secret workshop**

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## This Mumbai atelier is the secret workshop of top French fashion houses

For his new collection for Paris Fashion Week, French couturier Julien Fournie worked with India's Creations By Shanagar, whose clients include Jean Paul Gaultier, Yohji Yamamoto, Donna Karan and even the movie Moulin Rouge!.



Julien Fournie says his Indian craftsmen are the best embroideres in the world (Photo: AFP/BERTRAND GUAY)

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He says a sort of "design imperialism" means that French fashion houses often play down the fact that their fabrics are made outside France.

"India is number one in the world in embroidery. It's ancestral. They've been dressing maharajas in gold-embroidered outfits since the 16th century."



The haute couture creations featured in Julien Fournie's latest show at Paris Fashion Week (Photo: AFP/BERTRAND GUAY)

Fournie works with a company called Creations By Shanagar (meaning "to adorn" in Sanskrit), housed in a non-descript beige building near Mumbai's international airport.

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### "A LOT OF FANTASY"

For decades, they have played an essential but unsung role in the fashion industries of Europe, Japan and the United States.

"I like working with Julien because he is another master craftsperson who knows his subject very well," said director Chetan Desai, 55.

"He has a lot of fantasy. He comes up with his own concepts and I have to translate those ideas into embroidery.

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"It has been a very challenging experience and at the same time, it has been very fruitful," he added.

thread, passing it through transparent beads to create colour gradients. It's unprecedented," he said.

It gives silk an aged, elegant look for wedding dresses that "shine, but not too much".



Chetan Desai expanded his father's business internationally (Photo: AFP/Punit PARANJPE)

"Haute couture customers don't want to look like a Christmas tree," he added.

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Desai's father set up Creations By Shanagar in the 1960s as a workshop for handloomed and embroidered saris.

In the 1990s, Desai looked further afield to France, partnering with Franco-Tunisian designer Azzedine Alaïa on dresses that ultimately graced the likes of Naomi Campbell.

He does not divulge the current clients on his books but his past roster gives a sense of the high demand. They include Jean Paul Gaultier, Yohji Yamamoto and Donna Karan.



Creations by Shanagar has made fabrics for top fashion houses and the film 'Moulin Rouge!' (Photo: AFP/Punit PARANJPE)

Even Hollywood came knocking, with Shanagar helping design Nicole Kidman's costumes for the 2001 hit Moulin Rouge!.

The atelier attracts workers from across India, such as Biswajit Patra, 31, who has been working here since he was 16.

"I learned the trade in my village near Kolkata because my father was doing the same job and my brother and sister are also doing this job," he said.

Among their unique ideas is a way of rolling up pieces of tulle to make embroidered flowers.

"They have a range of techniques that we don't have here," said Jean-Paul Cauvin, director of Fournie's house in France.

One of the most delicate jobs is preparing the fabric once it arrives from India and heads for the workshop where it will be assembled into the dresses.

It is Fournie himself who irons out the fabric.

"Sixty per cent of haute couture is ironing," he said with a smile.

Source: AFP/mm



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