

# Furne Oné

Miami Fashion Week Designer Choice Awardee

Photos courtesy of Furne Oné



## The Fab and Fashionable Filipino

by CYNTHIA DE CASTRO  
AJPress



Furne Oné shows his portfolio during an interview with Asian Journal  
AJPress Photo by Miko Santos

A Cebuano who has been based in Dubai for more than 10 years now, Furne (short for Fernando) Oné studied Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of San Carlos in Cebu, Philippines.

While in Los Angeles after the Miami Fashion Week, Furne Oné graciously accepted the invitation from Asian Journal for an exclusive interview, before he goes back to Dubai. "It was my first time to join the Miami Fashion Week. You see, you can't just come and join the competition. You have to be invited," Furne explained to Asian Journal. "But the organizers of the event went to Dubai and attended the Dubai Fashion Fiesta where I participated. They liked my collection and invited me to join the MFW. And I'm so happy I did," said Furne who never expected to come home with the Designer's Choice Award. Furne's collections turned out to be the most anticipated show in the competition and the judges found Furne's collections "original and nice".

Describing his 39-piece collection, Furne said, "It is a fusion of styles from the East and the West. The clothes are fun, flirty, very ready-to-wear for parties. The gowns are lacy and adorned with colorful Swarovski jewels which reflect the vibrancy of the city of Miami."

A favorite designer of the rich and famous in Dubai and surrounding Arabic cities, Furne Oné revealed that he started to entertain the idea of designing clothes when he was ten years old. "My grandmother and mother were both fashionistas. They loved to wear beautiful clothes. Looking at them, I would sketch designs and I kept sketching as I grew older. Unfortunately, when I went to college in Cebu, there was no course on Fashion Design yet. So I took up Fine Arts," he recalled.

In 1994, Furne joined the 1st Mega Magazine Young Designers Competition and he got the top prize. The judges were big names in the global fashion industry like Filipina fashion designer Josie Natori, CEO and founder of New York-based The Natori Company, and Stephen Gan, co-founder of the fashion and art magazine, *Visionaire*.

The prize was a trip to Paris where Furne trained for a while. Then, Josie Natori invited Furne to New York where he worked as an apprentice in The Natori Company.

Upon his return to Cebu, Furne joined another fashion competition, sponsored by the government, where he once again got the top prize – a trip to Japan. While in Japan, Furne's collections won for him the coveted Japan's Women's Wear Award.

After his stint in Japan, Furne knew he wanted to be based abroad. The question was where. "I initially thought of New York since I've been there. Then, a friend suggested Dubai. I thought hard about it and realized that in Paris and in New York, there are many good fashion designers and the competition was going to be tough. So, I tried out Dubai. And I liked it there. It's a melting pot of races; in fact, there are more expats there than locals – lots of Europeans. It's also an open city; not as strict as other Arabic cities," shared Furne.

In Dubai, Furne started working for a company, designing and making clothes for wealthy Arabic women who love going to parties and weddings. After a few years, he was able to establish a loyal circle of clientele which encouraged him to move on with a fashion house of his own. "I wanted to concentrate on designing so I partnered with someone who will take care of the management/business side. And that's Rashid Ali. His company was one of my suppliers for fabrics," said Furne.

Furne and Rashid opened the Amato Haute Couture in 2002 with only 10 workers. Today, with two prestigious shops in Dubai catering to

thousands of women, they employ more than 70 workers; a mix of Filipinos, Indians, Arabs etc.

"I called it Amato, meaning beloved; and added haute couture because my designs are really high fashion and 80% stitched by hand. Beadwork is a must; otherwise your gown will just be ordinary," explained Furne who admitted having learned a lot from his Arab clients as well. "You know, there were times when some of my clients would say, 'I want you to add this, do that, extend here and there'. And initially, I would think to myself, 'parang OA na ata yan. Baka mag-mukhang chaka ang gown.' But when the gown was finished, it looked great. So, you see, we all learn a lot from each other," said the humble designer who shared that he has learned a lot in fashion designing while in Dubai.

Last year, something unexpected dramatically transformed Furne Oné into a celebrity in Europe's fashion world. German supermodel Heidi Klum was shown a catalogue of Furne's latest collection. She loved what she saw and invited Furne to Berlin. Klum asked Furne to design the gowns for all 18 models in the final round of her popular TV show, *Germany's Next Top Model*. The show was broadcast in Europe and pictures of Germany's Model of the Year wearing his gowns were splashed all over the media. Since then, Furne has become quite a celebrity in Germany having been featured in top German newspapers and fashion magazines. He suddenly found himself flooded with assignments from well-known European celebrities and has been working in Europe for several months.

"It all seems like a dream," says Furne. "Top international labels as well as upcoming designers from all over Europe vie to have their creations seen on the catwalk in this show. I still cannot believe that Heidi chose Amato over other famous European brands."

With no specific brief and only two months to create the 18 gowns, he began looking for inspiration. "Although my basic style is European, over the years I have adapted it to suit the taste of my clients in the UAE. So, I decided to travel all over Europe to understand and imbibe a European vibe in my designs," he says.

"Seeing the beautiful finalists walking down the ramp in my creations was great. The models told me that they felt like divas in my dresses. But the best compliment was the applause from the audience. And then seeing my name on the screen in the show's credits was a real high," he adds.

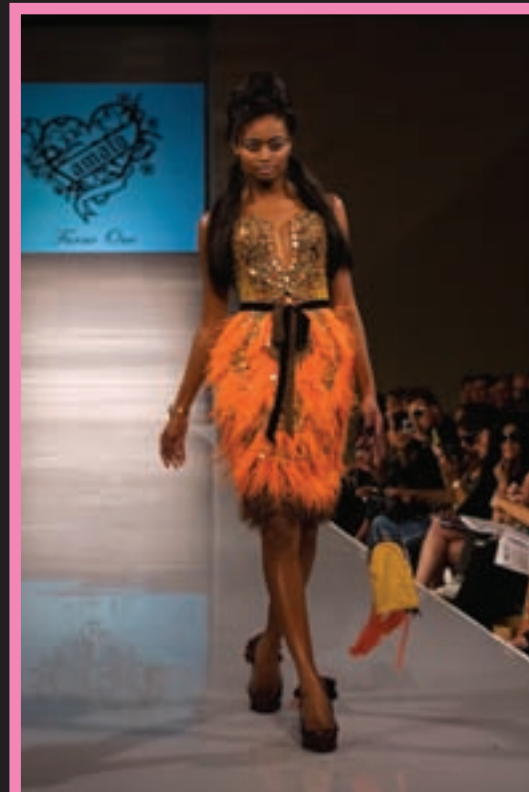
One also designed a white dress for popular actress and singer Jenny Elbers-Elbertzhagen, which won her the 'best dressed lady of the evening' at the exclusive Leipziger Opernball.

Furne Oné's gowns were such a hit that Heidi Klum again invited him to do the collection for this year's show. They just finished with the photo shoot in Las Vegas of his Bridal Collection for the next season of Klum's show. Furne says, "having your collection featured in a top rated show like this is the kind of exposure every designer dreams of. It has helped me transcend cultural boundaries and to grow as a designer."

"And it has opened a whole new world of exciting and infinite opportunities for me. Now I am dreaming of expanding my label to include prêt-a-porter and diffusion lines with a more international look," says Furne who is also looking into the possibility of expanding in America, specially since he won in Miami.

Asked about the keys to his success, Furne shared that it's about diligence. "Hard work and diligence. But, you know, there are so many talented designers everywhere so I think you also need a little luck. Being in the right place at the right time. I was lucky," he said with a smile. ■

The 11th Annual Miami Fashion Week (MFW) was held last March 19-22, 2009 in Miami Florida. More than 10,000 designers, buyers, models, celebrities, VIPs, fashion aficionados and fashion media from around the world took part in what they said was the most globally diverse Miami Fashion Week ever. During the past eleven years, MFW has evolved into one of the world's premier fashion events spotlighting designers from Europe, USA and Canada, the Caribbean, Middle East and Asia as well as the largest showcase of Latin American design talent in the world. The star-studded event featured personal appearances by 60 designers from all four corners of the globe. And among the handful of designers who took home the coveted Miami Moda and Music Awards was Filipino designer Furne Oné who received the Designer Choice Award.



Furne Oné's winning creations during the Miami Fashion Week

Photos by Paul Durano

Publisher's Note

**Dare to dream**

Creativity is a God-given gift -- one that must be acknowledged, tapped and shared in order for it to reach fruition. Furne Oné is a fine example of one who followed his dreams and dared to take on the challenges that came with it. The Asian Journal MDWK Magazine recognizes talent and the effort to take it to a higher level by bringing you Furne Oné's exciting and inspiring tale in this issue. ■