



photography by Sean Francis Martin

FASHION'S LATEST FLAVOUR: THAI

Siroj Chaisam, 30, is one of the leading lights in a new generation of Thai fashion designers.

Born in Bangkok and educated at Rangsit University and the Taxila Fashion School, Siroj Chaisam won his first award at the tender age of 20 – Best Young Designer 1994, Prieu Magazine. The title earned him the right to represent Thailand at the Asian Fashion Grand Prix in Osaka, Japan later that year.

Siroj has since followed up with a list of awards, including winner of the 1995 Design 21 Project (Paris), Thailand Young Fashion Designer of 1996, Excellent Piece of Work at the Asia Collection Makuhari Grand Prix '99 (Japan) and an invitee at the annual Young Designers Room, Bangkok International Fashion Fair 2002-2004.

The flavour of a Siroj Chaisam design is unmistakably Thai – the bold fusion of fabric, colour and line, the blend of traditional elegance with sassy character. Perhaps it is simply part of the Thai identity, itself such a mixture of cultural influences, but this ability to coalesce different looks into something new and fresh is the distinguishing feature of Siroj's work.

"I enjoy expressing my creativity by turning it into real clothes," Siroj says. "My inspiration comes from what surrounds me and from my experience of my country."



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BANGKOK'S MAKE-OVER

Fashion in Thailand is hot.

But is it hot enough to remake
Bangkok into the Paris of Asia?

The Thai government is banking on the fashion industry to help revitalize its economy, which has been slow in recovering from the 1997 Asian economic crisis. Close to 1.8 billion baht (about half a billion dollars) is being poured into the *Bangkok Fashion City* initiative, an all-out effort to change Bangkok's international image from a great place to shop for brand name knock-offs to Asia's new capital of original haut couture.

The challenge is that Thailand is not the only Asian country looking to fashion for an economic jump-start. Vietnam, Singapore, China, Taiwan, India – all are jockeying to be number one in the red hot Asian fashion industry. Quality textiles and low cost labour are two obvious drawing cards for the international design houses and brand name manufacturers.

Thailand, like its neighbours, is also determined to create a home grown industry. The government promotes young designers in showcases such as the annual Young Designers Room, the Young ThaiBrands store and a variety of initiatives aimed at increasing the profile of Thai brands both at home and abroad.

THE SUKHOTHAI BANGKOK

In a city increasingly catering to high-end tourists, The Sukhothai Bangkok hotel is in a class by itself.

For our fashion article, we asked for permission to shoot our model Melissa Courtney in the lobby and grounds of The Sukhothai, one of Bangkok's finest hotels. The hotel not only agreed, staff went out of their way to ensure we had everything we needed.

The Sukhothai believes in pampering guests. The service is stellar, amenities are immaculate and varied, restaurants are international, and rooms are simple yet somehow lavish. The architectural style is inspired by Sukhothai, the first great capital of Siam (1238-1376). The name itself means 'dawn of happiness.' The concept is somehow embedded in the Thai character, but you get a glimmer of its meaning in the lobby of the

hotel. Here you find the Sukhothai Tri Ratna, a stunning floral art installation by Thai artist Sakul Intakul and the focus of much of our shoot.

In English, it is known as the Triple Jewel of the Dawn of Happiness. It embodies the Tri Ratna (triple jewel) of Buddhism: the Buddha (the enlightened one), the Dharma (the teachings) and the Sangha (the community of monks). The floating lotuses at the base of the five-tier installation symbolize the Buddha, the pervasive fragrance of the tuberose the Dharma, and the reed mace the Sangha. This deeper meaning often eludes visitors, but the beauty of the work is something all relate to. 🌸



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