

LOCAL FASHION DESIGNERS CELEBRATE THE CRAFT

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The world is increasingly finding the District to not be an area that's just about politics. Fashion designers from the D.C. metropolitan area are making their mark in the industry, taking part in events locally and along the East Coast.

Some fashionistas, like Kelsy Dominick, are putting the region on the map.

Last month, she attended New York Fashion Week (NYFW) for the first time during which presented her clothing collection DiDomenico, which derives from her Italian surname, which means "the day of God." That week, Sofia Nikitchuk, Miss Russia 2015, saw one her dresses, which Dominick said she'll use in an international show in Taiwan in December.

"[At first], I was nervous [and] a little on the edge. [But], walking on stage I had a huge sigh of relief. I realized it wasn't a dream," Dominick, who hails from Haymarket, Virginia, said about her experience at NYFW. "That one person can change the exposure of the brand," she said.

Other local designers have enjoyed similar success during Fashion Week events in New York and the District. Artists have taken that love for fashion -- which one can see in the heart of Adams Morgan, U Street, and K Street -- to the runway. In a way, they represent the different walks of life, cultures, and backgrounds that make D.C. a unique city.

NYFW took place at Skylight at Moynihan Station and Skylight Clarkson Square in New York in September. International Management Group (IMG), a global leader in sporting events, media, and fashion, managed the weeklong event. Mark Shapiro, IMG's chief content officer, said he wanted to create the best experience possible that extended beyond a physical location and moment in time.

"We're looking forward to reintroducing the industry to a showcase of creative talent, style and innovation that made the New York runways famous," Shapiro wrote on the NYFW website.

D.C. Fashion Week (DCFW) partnered with independent fashion designers,



A model walks in a piece from local fashion designer Michelle Gibson's MCG collection during D.C. Fashion Week. / Photo courtesy of Phelan Marc

producers, and models. It was created to increase economic development in the area of fashion design, clothing merchandising and modeling. Its purpose is to enhance the visibility of the nation's capital as a center for international fashion.

Michelle C. Gibson, another Maryland-based fashion designer who participated in DCFW activities, said she had difficulty turning her clothing line, MCG, into something tangible. She noted that artists and designers often have to learn to trust their instinct and understand that only they can understand their vision.

With her work, Gibson said she learned

how to translate what she sees so others can identify with it. By being relatable, she has found her voice as a fashion designer. "I think understanding that you have to be a storyteller in order for people to understand you and your vision, is something I have realized as I have gotten older," said Gibson, 23.

For local fashion designer Velicia Steadman, her work has become a family affair. She recalled reluctantly learning how to sew when she was younger. When she first started sewing she just made things for her house. She started out just making curtains and pillows. Her mom kept influencing her to try clothing and her mom knows that I am very particular about her clothes.

She was very reluctant to start sewing apparel, but she kept on her.

Steadman said she has taken that attention to detail in her own endeavors. During D.C. Fashion Week, Steadman said her most memorable moment was when walked the stage showing off her fashion line, Very Rich Style, and saw her mother intently watching from the audience.

"At first I did not want to learn how to sew, but my mom kept coercing me into it, I don't know maybe she saw something in me that I didn't," Steadman said. "[Since then], fashion has been a love affair. Maybe [my mother] saw something in me I didn't," she added.

That love for fashion in tandem with the sights and sounds of the city can inspire a new creation. That was the case for Nicole Oliver, Clinton, Md.-based designer and founder of Arreit Nicole. She also participated in Fashion Week, unveiling wares she said were influenced by D.C.'s architecture.

For example, the tangerine-colored lines in her clothes represent the sun. The zippers also show how the sun hits the beams of buildings from different angles. She said making her dreams come to fruition involved an intricate trial-and-error process that included choosing the right fabrics.

"It can be rewarding just saying that you're done," said Oliver about her clothing. "Keep going, and don't let anybody kill your dreams. I don't care how big you think they are. Live with no regrets. God has a purpose for everything."