The Future of Fashion

MDC's MFI Graduates Show at Miami Fashion Week

Photo by Elizabeth Velasquez







Clockwise: Models backstage at Miami Fashion Week; MFI grad Alicia Fineli, center, at the show finale; MFI grad Silvia Dardon being interviewed

At the Ice Palace in Downtown Miami, **Miami Fashion Week** gave a nod to emerging talent from Miami Dade College's Miami Fashion Institute, the educational partner for the event.

As the lights focused on the catwalk, 54 looks from 11 MFI designers were showcased. With the level of quality that came down the runway, no one would have known that the student designers were showing their work for the first time. Even more notable: These 11 graduates were the first from a two-year program at a public institution to show their work at a major fashion week.

"I think part of the greatness of being involved in a major fashion week that's on the **Council of Fashion Designers of America** calendar of events is that these students would have never had an opportunity to show without someone backing them financially, or their being in business for five years or more," said MFI Chair Asanyah Davidson. The Institute also coordinated and hosted the week's master class series featuring speakers from around the globe.

The theme of MFI's show was the future – fitting considering that the student designers represent the future of fashion in Miami as the Institute's first graduating class. Their task: design clothing as it might be 30 years from now.

Many of the students incorporated world-altering events in their future story lines. MFI graduate Raquel Theodoro's Asian-influenced looks focused on high-contrast colors and oversized functional zippers to serve a fictitious population reeling from a bomb that left them visually impaired. Buttons on the clothing are patterned to be read as braille.

MFI graduate Natalija Makejeva's collection, Dubai 2050, featured architectural concepts and far less modesty than is typical in today's Middle Eastern garb for women.

"I think there will be more freedom and women will have more choices in the future," Makejeva said. "So you see a little exposure but also coverage."

The unique way each student interpreted the futuristic theme showed the range of imaginative powers the class possessed. MFI grad Yaritza Trinidad was approached by audience members offering to buy her work – and she wasn't alone.

"You design for the everyday, hard-working woman, and when that woman comes up to you and wants to buy your clothes, it's an amazing feeling," Trinidad said.

– BC



MFI grad Gabriela Lopes, right, with a model sporting one of her designs



Model wearing design by Alicia Fineli at show finale



Left: Model wearing Dubai 2050 design by MFI's Natalija Makejeva
Below: MFI grad Yaritza Trinidad escorts models wearing her designs.

CREATIVE endeavors



MFI Chair Asanyah Davidson and graduate Raquel Theodoro

Fashion Internships Put MFI Students on Path to Success

Miami Dade College's Miami Fashion Institute connects students with meaningful internships, and some are leading to jobs.

MFI graduates Silvia Dardon, Alicia Fineli and Kenneth Montealegre all interned with **Oscar Carvallo**, the international couture designer who launched an atelier in Miami's Design District in 2015.

Dardon, who was offered a position there, said she has loved expanding her knowledge of garment making. With a background in Parisian *haute couture*, the Oscar Carvallo brand focuses on hand-crafted clothes. Dardon's favorite projects have been custom wedding gowns.

"In Guatemala, my mother trained me to make garments by hand, to press and piece things together like a tailor, but when I grew up and worked in a factory, they wanted fast production," Dardon said. "When I interviewed with Mr. Carvallo, they asked for the old skills. It saved my craft and made me proud of what I know."

Dardon's talents landed her a spot in the Parsons School of Design fashion master's program, but she has decided to stay in Miami and continue working at Oscar Carvallo.

Some of the Institute's Fashion Merchandising graduates also snagged coveted internships, including Grace Ramroop, who interned at **Saks Fifth Avenue**, and Alexandra Martin, who interned with **Juana de Arco**, the eco-friendly clothing line out of Argentina. Martin's experience at MFI has opened her eyes to environmental issues facing the fashion industry. She plans to focus her career on sustainable business practices.

MFI graduate Raquel Theodoro is already working as an assistant technical designer at global tennis and golf apparel brand **Lucky in Love**, where she interned for a year and a half. "MFI prepared me with the knowledge and confidence to succeed," she said. "It's very gratifying to jump into the industry that has been my lifelong passion."

– BC



A Sweet Idea

Chocolate Lover Finds Creative Inspiration at MDC

They say inspiration is often found in the most unexpected places. For food entrepreneur and Miami Dade College alumna Carolina Quijano, that creative muse came in the form of a baking class she took "just for fun" at MDC, Kendall Campus over a decade ago.

"The class was taught by a French pastry chef, so it really focused on simple techniques using really quality ingredients," Quijano said. "We learned how to make truffles and soon I was making them for my friends and family all the time. This was when I first really fell in love with chocolate."

What Quijano didn't know was that the experience would change her future. After graduating from the University of Miami and working in finance for 10 years, Quijano found herself in Paris when a business idea came to her. "There wasn't anywhere in the U.S. that I knew of that had the same level of quality chocolate," she said. "That's when I took what I had learned at MDC and began experimenting more with chocolate."

Quijano eventually cashed out her 401(k) retirement savings plan and went all in on her business, **Exquisito Fine Chocolate**, first selling her handmade chocolate to hotels and pastry chefs, and later, from her website, exquisitochocolates.com.

In 2018, Exquisito opened a retail space in Miami's Little Havana neighborhood where in addition to selling chocolate, Quijano offers tours so customers can learn more about the chocolate-making process.

"Everyone eats chocolate but no one really knows where it comes from," she said. The storefront "is more than just a shop; it's a social investment back into the community."

In the kitchen, Quijano has leveraged the talent at MDC's Miami Culinary Institute. One of her pastry chefs is a recent MCI grad and she hopes to continue offering opportunities to additional alums.

"I can teach others what it takes to run a business – the entrepreneurial side," she said. "But I also want to learn from them and gain a more formal culinary viewpoint."

– AVG



Carolina Quijano

Entering the Void

ALIENWARE

Alienware Publishes Student-Designed Video Game



Alien and human crew members round out the cast of characters in the video game *Void*.

The quintessential murder mystery is timeless. Everyone wants to know who did it, right? So it's no surprise that a whodunit is the theme of the first video game launched by the Game Development and Design class at the Miami Animation and Gaming International Complex (MAGIC) at Miami Dade College.

What is remarkable is that the final product, named *Void*, impressed gaming giant **Alienware** so much that they decided to publish the game on their Alienware Arena site, which has global viewership.

"It's a huge success story," said Mauricio Ferrazza, chair at MAGIC. "Alienware created a page on their website for MDC's MAGIC, and the game is there for download."

To be sure, *Void* isn't your grandma's version of the classic board game Clue. Welcome to the future, where this murder mystery includes an interactive spaceship, uber-cool alien, human and cyborg characters, and a game board (in this case, ship) that blows up if you're overzealous in your accusations against crew members.

"My team and the support staff at MDC were integral to this," said MDC alumnus Josh Field, the MAGIC class of 2018 graduate who conceived and led the project. "It wasn't a one-person thing, and it wouldn't have happened if everyone didn't pull together the way they did."

Nearly 30 people, including 24 students and a few professors and mentors (including **Leah Hoyer**, VP of creative at **Tell-tale Games**), worked together over two semesters to bring *Void* to life. The teams stayed busy writing code, designing features, creating visual aspects, writing character dialogues, developing the user interface and testing the game throughout the process.

"MAGIC really simulates a production environment and all the nuances that come with that," Field said. "It gave us insight that classes alone wouldn't have given us."

– BC

