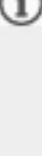


FASHION AND BEAUTY

Albert Andrada: From royal frocks to Brigitte Bardot-inspired fashion

LIVIN' AND LOVIN' - Tetta Ortiz Matera - The Philippine Star  July 3, 2013 | 12:00am



When one listens to Albert Andrada talk about his life of privilege and luxury working as one of three Filipino designers for the ruling royal family of Fujeirah, one of the seven kingdoms of the United Arab Emirates, you might wonder why he ever came home. But after 20 years of working in the Middle East, 10 of those with the royal family, he decided after much thought and prayer that it was time to come back to the Philippines.

“I am very happy to be back,” Albert told me. “It is not always money and luxury that counts and I missed my family,” explained this down-to-earth designer. “I saw how alive Philippine fashion was during Philippine Fashion Week, how many talented young designers there were; I felt like it was time to return home and share my experience and the wisdom I learned working overseas with the young designers,” Albert enthused.

The sheika, the wife of the head of the royal family was sad when Albert left but she understood his decision to go back to the Philippines.

“I was very close to them, they treated me like family even if I was their employee,” explained Albert. “They provided me with a house right outside the Royal Palace of Fujeirah and I could go into the palace and into the room of the Sheika without restriction. I traveled everywhere with them in their private plane, staying in five-, six-star hotels, eating in the best restaurants and shopping in the most high-end boutiques and specialty stores,” shares Albert. He was on call 24 hours, seven days a week but he didn’t mind because it was all very exciting and rewarding, personally and professionally.

While he is grateful for that time in his life, the Manila-born designer is now focused on establishing a name for himself in Philippine fashion. Despite his exposure to unimaginable extravagance and wealth in the Middle East, Albert Andrada is neither flamboyant nor flashy; he prefers to be low-key and does not like bringing attention to himself. He dresses in a simple yet elegant manner and while he clearly fancies using luxury brands, he stays away from the heavily logoed or “status-defining” ones and opts for the more refined labels.

In an exclusive interview with **Philippine STAR**, Albert recalls some of the most mind-blowing, surreal experiences he had working with royalty, his feelings about being back home, his plans for the Albert Andrada brand and his current state of mind.

PHILIPPINE STAR: When did you realize that you wanted to become a fashion designer?

ALBERT ANDRADA: In high school I already knew I wanted to become a fashion designer. My mom used to take me to fashion shows and I was inspired by how well she dressed even when she was hosting parties at home.

Did you study fashion design?

Not immediately. I don’t know why but I took interior design first and quickly realized I was not in my element so I shifted to fashion design and enrolled at Slim’s Fashion School. I also took short courses at Central Saint Martins in London.

What were your first designs like?

I actually used to design uniforms, corporate attire and had a shop in Quezon City. Then I was offered a job to work in Dubai.

Wow, that was quite a jump! Why did you decide to leave?

The Philippine economy was not very good back then so I took the challenge to work in the Middle East.

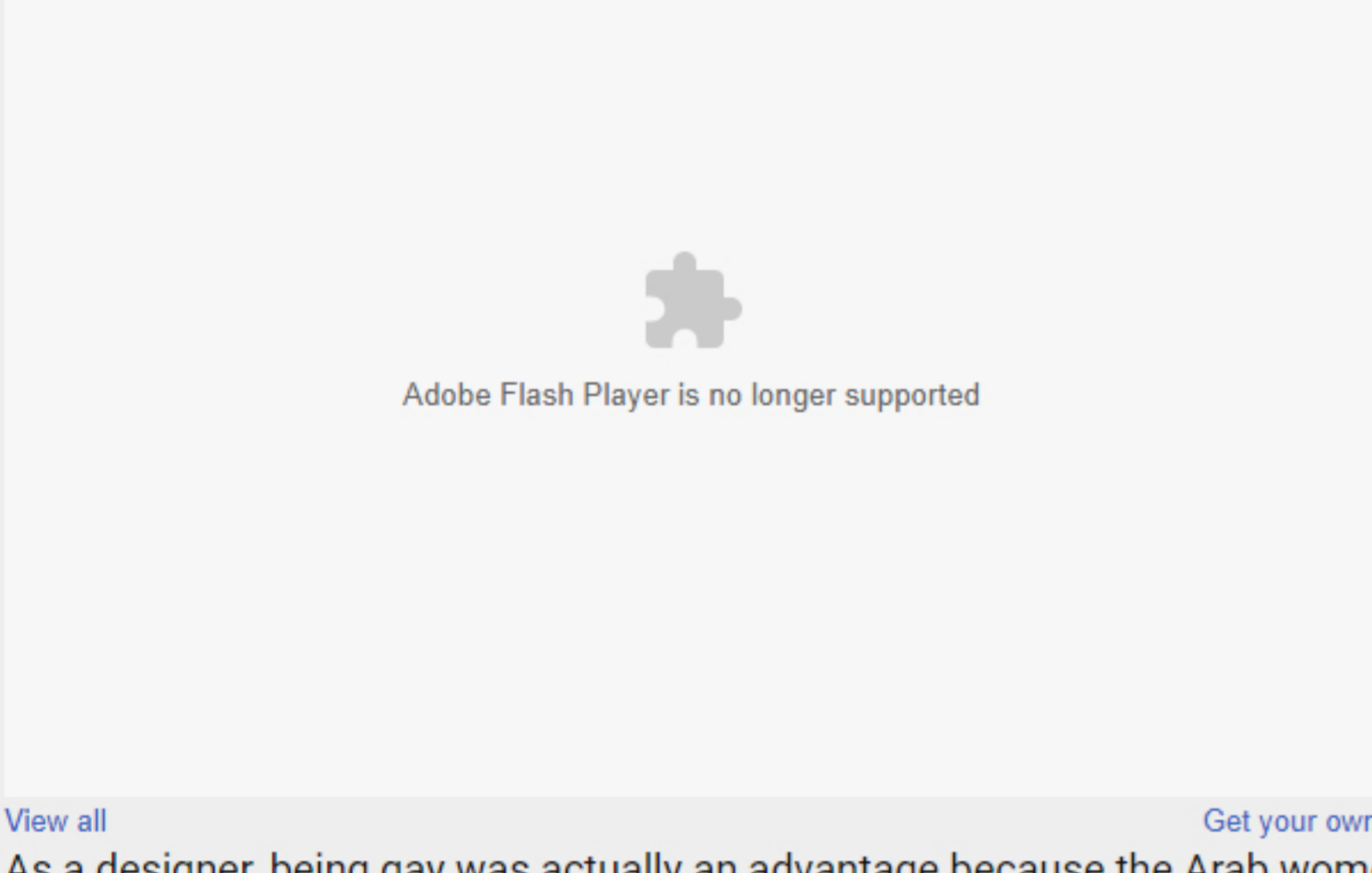
How did you end up working for the ruling royal family of Fujeirah?

I won the Swarovski Designer of the Year award in Dubai in 2002 where I bested contestants from other countries; immediately after that I was contacted by someone from the royal family of Fujeirah and was offered a job and I took it.

Let’s talk about that. I’ve heard outlandish stories about royal families. What was your personal experience working in a royal household?

I was actually very fortunate to work with such a wonderful, considerate family in such an ideal arrangement. While I worked non-stop in an atelier inside the palace, I had privacy and was treated with respect by all the members of the royal family. I supervised a staff of 30 from different countries and got to travel to many places for leisure and in search of fabrics and materials.

Was being gay and Catholic ever an issue working for a Muslim royal family?



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As a designer, being gay was actually an advantage because the Arab women know that gays are artistic in everything. As an individual, it was difficult because homosexuality is against their religion. As for being a Catholic, that was never an issue; they respected the religion of their employees from India, Pakistan, Lebanon and the Philippines. They even encouraged me to throw Christmas parties!

Wow, that is great to hear! Who did you actually design for in the royal family?

The sheik and the sheika had six children, three daughters and three sons; I occasionally designed for the daughters but their mother was my main client.

How can one person require an in-house designer and a staff of 30 to make clothes for her? How many clothes do you actually create for the sheika ?

On average, I make around 30 outfits for the sheika every week. They range from clothes to meet with VIP and non-VIP guests, clothes to shop in, clothes to travel with, even clothes to wear around the house. One time she called me to her room, handed me a diamond-studded bracelet worth millions of dollars and just like that told me to make an outfit to match the diamond bracelet!

That is simply out of this world! You mentioned that you traveled together with the royal family for leisure and sometimes on your own for work. Where has your job taken you?

Practically all over the world but Italy, France, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States were frequent destinations; Milan, Paris, Madrid, London and New York City, the fashion capitals were always such favorites. I remember one time, the sheika asked me to look for a particular scarf that she wanted to wear; I traveled to Italy, France, Lebanon even Hong Kong to search for that scarf. Ordinarily, I shop for fabrics and other materials like stones outside of the UAE and I fly in their private plane or First Class.

How would you describe your design aesthetic when you were working in the United Arab Emirates?

Opulent and dramatic but wearable. Arab women love complicated cuts and patterns and while they like embellishments or bling on their clothes, they prefer the opulence to come from the fabrics.

Where do you get your inspiration?

From all my travels.

What was the most enjoyable thing about living in Dubai and in Fujeirah?

Dubai is such a modern city and everything that was in Europe was there. In Dubai and Fujeirah, with such high expectations from a globe trotting clientele, I understood what true luxury was and what satisfying customers with impeccable quality meant. I was able to hone my craft and become very good at what I do. It was also such a plus to have easy access to an extensive selection of fabrics and materials.

How would you differentiate working in UAE and Manila?

There is a big difference in culture and tradition between the UAE and Manila and I was always very mindful of this. While Dubai has become a modern city, it is still predominantly conservative Muslim.

I know Cary Santiago used to work in Dubai; Michael Cinco, Ezra Santos, Furne One are still working there, were you all always friends?

I knew them when we were still all living in the Philippines but we were not friends then; we became close in Dubai.

You came back to Manila for good in October 2012, what have you been up to since?

Well, I have been participating in Philippine Fashion Week since 2011 and I closed the latest Philippine Fashion Week held in May 2013 with a solo show. I opened an atelier in Greenbelt 5 in March and I have been steadily building up my local clientele, both answered prayers I might add. While I have ready-made clothes in the boutique, I have been receiving requests for more made-to-order dresses and gowns. On July 30, I will present my first-ever independent and by-invitation only gala fashion show inspired by Brigitte Bardot at the Sofitel.

What should we expect from a Brigitte Bardot-inspired gala fashion show?

My silhouettes for the show will definitely flatter the woman’s body; Hourglass will be a recurring theme in the entire collection. It will also go hand-in-hand with Sofitel’s launch on the same day, July 30 of BB Forever, the Brigitte Bardot “La Legende” exhibition at Le Bar; it is an exclusive collection of close to 30 photos that traces her career as one of 20th century cinema’s leading figures.

You told me that you had to adjust your design aesthetic to cater to the Filipino taste; can you explain what that means?

Filipinos have a more refined taste so less embellishments and simpler cuts and patterns.

Who among the local and international designers do you admire, look up to?

I have always admired the work of Filipino designers Inno Sotto, Christian Espiritu and Jocie Lloren; internationally, I am a huge fan of Elie Saab.

You have already dressed royalty, is there anyone else you dream of dressing?

Yes, absolutely! My big fashion wish is to someday dress European royalty, particularly Kate Middleton, Michelle Obama and Imelda Marcos.

What is your current state of mind?

Grateful and blessed.

I asked Albert what if the sheika found out all the wonderful things he was doing in the Philippines and asked him to go back to Fujeirah? Albert replied, “*Naku, huwag muna*, if she calls me I am not ready to go yet again, I cannot afford to leave my business!” After spending two decades owing the UAE, I agree that Albert Andrada should stay in Manila “it is now our turn to take pride and be wowed by this fabulous designer with his equally fabulous designs.

Special thanks to Sofitel for providing the location for the shoot; Rey Legarda of Il Mio Studio for the Hair & Make-up and Rencie Santos for the accessories.

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