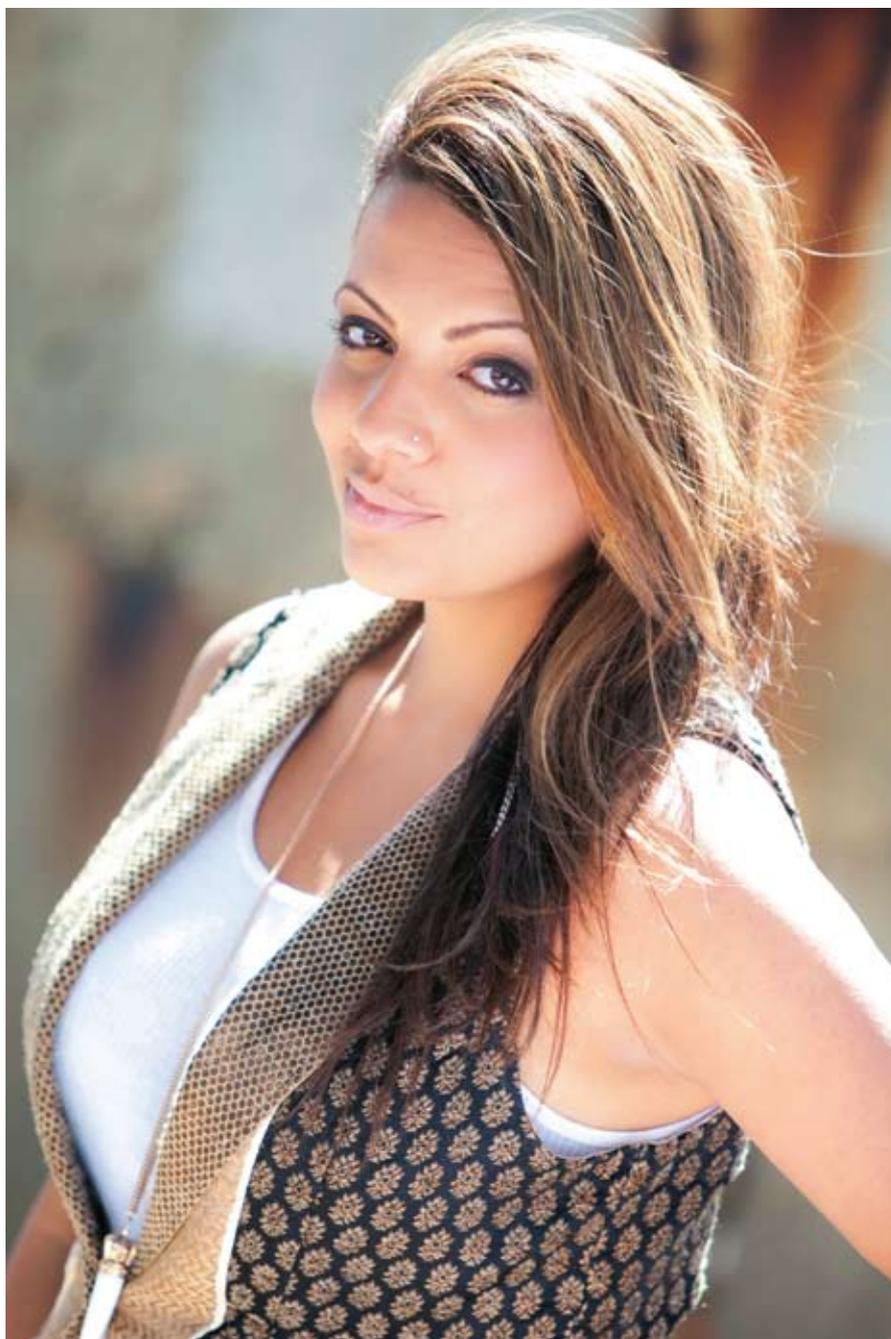


After Los Angeles and Miami, biKa comes to India. **Ambika Sanjana**, Co-President and Creative Director, biKa, talks to **Benaifer J. Mirza** about the label's exclusive designs, its future plans and why Mumbai is a great market for high-end swimwear.

Beach Couture



“ I HAVE COME UP WITH SWIMWEAR THAT IS EXTREMELY UNIQUE; IT HIGHLIGHTS TRADITIONAL INDIAN HANDICRAFT WORK. ”

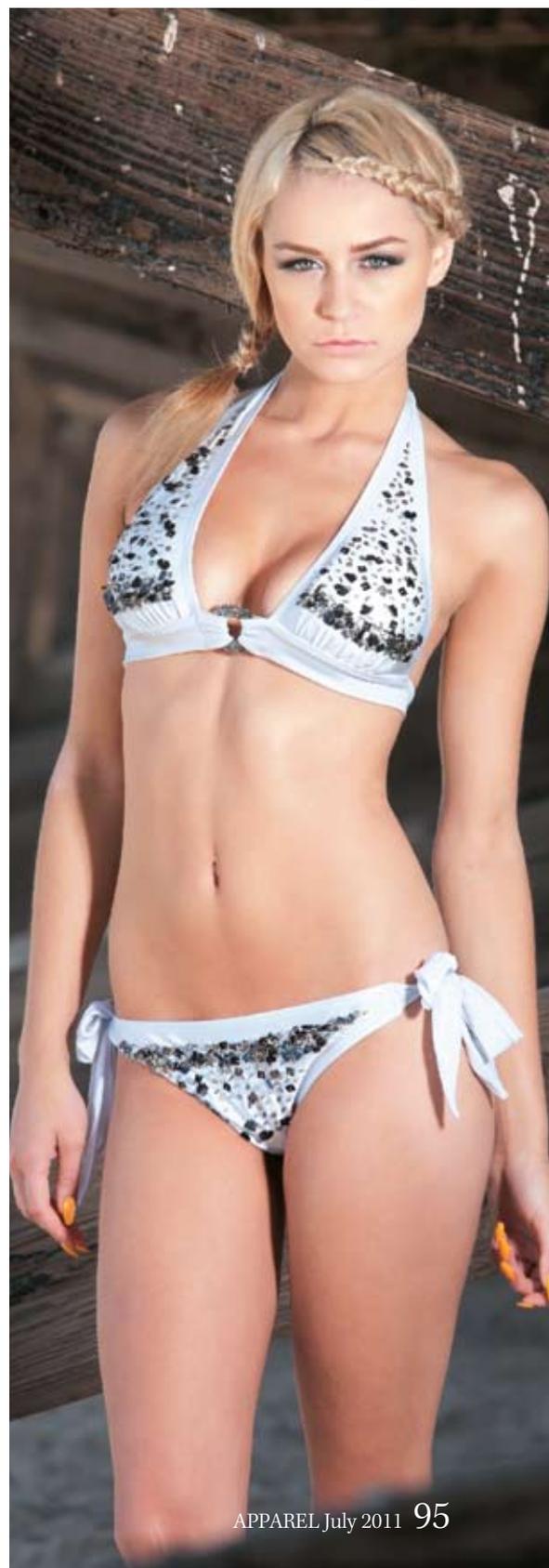
When did your love story with clothes begin?

I have always been extremely keen on fashion. When I was in university, studying acting, part of our curriculum involved taking wardrobe classes where we learned how to stitch and style costumes for several genres in theatre. Even after I got my degree in acting, I found myself drawn to all aspects of fashion. When I moved to Mumbai to pursue acting in 2007, I worked with Neeta Lulla for a short while. It was during this time that I was fascinated by how Indian techniques of embellishment were so opulent. I spent a lot of time drawing up ideas I had and soon I knew I

needed to create a line that was a fusion of both my worlds.

What is biKa?

Three years ago, I started B.Vika in LA. I had a business partner back then, but eventually we parted ways professionally. I then conceptualised and created an entirely new line called biKa. Swimwear is essential for girls who live in California, Miami, etc. These cities have a huge beach culture, as it's a very social thing to do. I have come up with swimwear that is extremely unique; it highlights traditional Indian handicraft work. The whole idea is to use Indian work, but in a very urban



way, and to make it fit into the fashion scene on beaches internationally.

Tell us something about your design team and manufacturing unit.

I design everything. I love going to Delhi and Gujarat to find the sequins, resham silk etc., and mixing and matching different things with Indian materials, keeping the foreign sensibility in mind. The manufacturing unit is set up in Mumbai. Everything is produced here and then exported to the US.

With swimwear, the base fabric is the most important. It needs to have longevity and shouldn't start crumbling and coming apart. As a designer, if I am marketing a high-end product, I must spend money on its quality. I use imported double stretch Lycra from Carvico, Italy. This is one amongst the best qualities of Lycra available in the market. The embellishments and embroidery materials are sourced from all around India. The fabrics used in my tunics and cover-ups, such as georgette, bamboo silk and crepe chiffon are all sourced from the local markets. Since they are cover-ups, the fabrics used can be more delicate and have a flow to them.

Tell us a little about the designs in your line.

In my entire line, each piece has a different style. Some are halters, which give more support and are, thus, apt for women who are well-endowed. I also have the regular triangle bikini tops, bandeaus and styles with variations on them. In the bottoms, I have the regular bikini briefs but with little twists — rouched bottoms, tie-ups, Brazilian cut, etc. I also do one-pieces and monokinis (bikinis joined in the centre). It's good for women who like a little more coverage. And, of course, I have the wraps and tunics that will cover you up, but ensure that you still look sexy on the beach.

The motifs on your swimwear are beautiful. From where do you get the inspiration?

I draw a lot of inspiration from India while using the ancient techniques of embellishment in a contemporary





“ IN THE RECENT FEW YEARS, A NUMBER OF GYMS HAVE OPENED UP EVERYWHERE. THERE'S AN INFLUX OF HEALTH, FITNESS AND WELLNESS. THE CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE FITNESS LEVELS WILL INCREASE THE EASE WITH WHICH OUR WOMEN WEAR AND CARRY OFF SWIMWEAR. ”

style. Archetypal motifs are a part of our heritage. The paisley, lotus and peacock are reoccurring patterns found in the tapestry of Indian handicraft; each with its own strong symbolism. The lotus stands for purity and divinity, the paisley represents fertility and abundance, and the peacock embodies royalty and compassion.

Do you mass produce each design?

Not at all! I don't want to make a thousand pieces of one particular design. I, too, am very particular about what I wear and wouldn't want to be seen in something that every girl in Mumbai is wearing. If I am spending as much as ₹10,000 on a swimsuit, I don't want to go to a beach party and see another girl wearing the same thing. In terms of production, I have been very conscious in keeping my numbers down. I make a maximum of 60 -100 pieces of a particular style, so the chances of seeing two girls wearing the same piece are very slim.

After LA and Miami, what makes you enter India?

Today, many Indians are going abroad and shopping for swimwear; so why not buy swimwear that looks Indian, is created by an Indian designer and can be bought from India itself? Our extensive market research reveals that there's a huge change in the approach towards fitness here. In the recent few years, a number of gyms have opened up everywhere. There's an influx of health, fitness and wellness. The consciousness in the fitness levels will increase the ease with which our women wear and carry off swimwear.

And, of course, I was born in Mumbai, so the place is really special for me. I want to bring my brand to my hometown!

What's the price range?

My collection ranges from ₹6,000- ₹12,000 approximately.

Do you think there will be a demand for such high-end swimwear in a price-conscious market such as India?

Mumbai and Delhi are some of the most expensive cities I have lived in. They are comparable to London and





“ THOUGH THE PRICE-POINTS ARE HIGH AS MY LABEL IS HIGH-END, IT’S NOT A RIP OFF FOR WHAT YOU’RE GETTING. THE QUALITY IS GREAT, THE DESIGNS AND COLOURS ARE UNIVERSAL...”

LA. Though the price-points are high as my label is high-end, it’s not a rip off for what you’re getting. The quality is great, the designs and colours are universal and trendy, and the work of the motifs is all handmade and extremely exquisite.

Any plans of setting up a retail outlet?

Yes. In the next three years, I do see some retail outlets opening in LA, Miami and Mumbai.

What is your online retail model like?

We are currently selling on bikabazaar.com.

In the Indian swimwear market, who’s your biggest competitor?

I don’t see any competition, as nobody

is doing my kind of work. I don’t mean to be supercilious, but it’s just that there is no Indian designer who’s focussing on selling only swimwear right now.

After Mumbai, which Indian city is your next target?

Delhi, for sure!

What should a woman keep in mind while buying swimwear?

It’s all about finding something that suits your body type and makes you feel confident.

Tell us a little about biKa’s future plans.

In July, we are doing the Miami Swim Week. It sees the participation of all the big brands in the international swimwear industry. Of course, we are

really excited to enter India. There’s a big launch planned later this year, and we are also planning to tie-up with a high-end boutique chain. I feel fortunate to have spent time growing up with immediate accessibility to the beaches of Miami and LA, but, unfortunately, most Indian women don’t have the freedom of simply relaxing on the beach. I am planning to bring some of that beach culture here by planning some pool-related events in the hotels of South Mumbai.

After Mumbai, next would be Australia and Ibiza, Spain. These are two places where people live in their swimwear! We are soon going to be supplying to two-three boutiques in Ibiza.

In terms of designs, I have already created eight new styles as an addition to this collection. We shall release them in Fall, just in time for the resort season. Without revealing the main theme, the little I can tell you is that in the next collection, I intend to use elements of LA, Miami and Mumbai, and it will have to do with the skylines of these cities. ♣