

FASHION FRATERNITY



HAUTE @ DUBAI

IT'S BECOME A GLOBAL PHENOMENON AND HAS TAKEN OVER THE LIVES OF TWO OF DUBAI'S FILIPINO RESIDENTS. BUT LAMODADUBAI.COM STARTED FROM MUCH HUMBLER BEGINNINGS

BY BRIAN SALTER

"We have discovered that fashion is very much a niche market and sometimes we are surprised how many people take it all so seriously"

SHERRY TENORIO and Jim Joquico never believed for one moment that their hobby would turn into such an overnight sensation. "I've always been interested in fashion," Jim says, "and with the advent of some other fashion blogs, it was something I thought I'd like to try out for myself. Sherry started pressing me to start our own blog, not knowing that I already had that idea. In fact, I even registered the domain www.LaModaDubai.com in December 2009, two months before she stepped up the pressure on me to start it off..."

"...It was a bit like the plot from *The Social Network*," Sherry says, jumping in with practised alacrity as Jim pauses for breath. "He claims he had the idea all along, whereas I am sure he got the idea from me." A grin spreads over both their faces before Sherry concedes "actually we were jointly inspired by the TV series *Ugly Betty*. We saw every single episode of it. The name of the magazine there is *Mode Magazine* and that is how we created *La Moda*. But we never aimed to take ourselves too seriously."

The *La Moda Dubai* website divides into a number of different sections: fashion, beauty, shopping, photo shoots, TV and videos, celebrities and parties; but fashion is the most popular section.

"We planned on it being more of a web site than a blog site," Jim continues "following along the lines of vogue.com. We wanted to concentrate on news and opinions rather than just show off the latest designs. In the beginning we planned to update it two or three times a week."

But after only a short time, the editor of a local women's magazine started paying attention to their web site and encouraged them to develop it into something much more commercial — "a bit like fashionista.com," says Sherry. "Without her input, we might never have realised how big this could get."

It was in Dubai Fashion Week last



FASH BRATS: Jim Joquico and Sherry Tenorio
Photo: Brian Salter

October that things really started to take off. The event concentrated people's minds on fashion and Jim and Sherry saw a tremendous surge of interest in their site. They also have a Facebook page, which already has 7,800 people registered, they use Twitter and they spread the word at events.

Jim now works on the site full time, taking freelance work in the evenings to keep himself going, while Sherry puts in a good couple of hours every day too. They go onto fashion web sites, shopping sites, researching stories and writing up their own opinions on things going on in the fashion industry, as well as covering news and gossip. "One of our most popular



stories was when Carine Roitfeld, French Vogue Editor-in-Chief was banned from a show at the French fashion house Balenciaga," says Jim. "Another of our popular stories was about haute couturier Michael Cinco — the Dubai-based Filipino designer who has been dressing up Tyra Banks' aspiring supermodel-wannabes in the current season of *America's Next Top Model*."

But nothing could have prepared them for what happened when they ran a story following a press release from H&M. One of their readers commented that the H&M picture shown in the Middle East was different from that shown elsewhere in the world. Despite revealing only arms and a hint of cleavage, Brazilian supermodel Gisele Bündchen had been digitally altered in three images, subjected to 'photoshopping' with a t-shirt or vest added under her clothes.

"We put out an update and tipped off fashionista.com about the differences in the pictures. Our angle wasn't the censoring, but why it is done over here," says Sherry, "and the next thing we knew was that Vogue UK picked up on the story, followed by Vogue Italia, The Daily Telegraph, the Daily Mail, Metro, Marie Claire..."

"...and media in Germany, Spain, India, the Netherlands..." Jim jumps in. "Suddenly it went viral and we ended up with over 100,000 page views from all over the world on that one day alone."

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appointed an ad agency after we topped 50,000 page views a month which coincided with some of the brands ramping up their digital campaigns. A few weeks ago, for instance, we ran a Miss Selfridge promotion in which participants were invited to go to the store and try on clothes, take pictures of themselves in those outfits and then upload them to the site."

So what plans does the spirited duo have for the future of their site? Jim is in no doubt whatsoever: "We intend to start going to some of the fashion weeks in New York, London and Paris and do our own reports from there. We have discovered that fashion is very much a niche market and sometimes we are surprised how many people take it all so seriously. We never imagined it would get this far. But we have found that every aspect of our lives has started to revolve around La Moda Dubai."

"Just imagine," breaks in Sherry one last time, "we even get emails from Vogue pitching their stories at us to write. How amazing is that!"

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