

## Designer Zara Umrigar to showcase her new collection at Paris Fashion Week

Mumbai Mirror | Sep 15, 2019, 06:00 AM IST



PIC: SANJAY MD

By Fareeda Kanga

### Small talk with Zara Umrigar

**Designer Zara Umrigar, the great granddaughter of Raja Dhanrajgir, will showcase her new collection at Paris Fashion Week later this month**

Soft light washes over glamorous gowns with high slits and dramatic trains at Zara Umrigar's Colaba boutique. Somewhere between the swathes of fabric embellished with beads and baubles, we find the 30-year-old designer hard at work on a collection that will be showcased at Paris Fashion Week, at the end of September. This is no small honour. Even the uninitiated

know that PFW is one of the most prestigious fashion weeks — it's indeed one of the 'Big Four' fashion weeks in the world, the others being Milan, London and New York.

It's a success that points to how passionately Umrigar feels about her work. This, she says, she has inherited from her mother, the former Miss India, Sabita Dhanrajgir, who has run a successful bespoke Indian wear label for the last three decades.

Sabita is the granddaughter of Raja Dhanrajgir, the monarch who famously loaned the Nizam money to build railways across Hyderabad. He also built Dhanraj Mahal in Colaba, near the Gateway of India monument — at the time of its construction, the most expensive residential complex in Mumbai. Yet the inheritance the Raja's great granddaughter cherishes the most is a powerful work ethic.

"I remember sitting with my mum and watching her work," says Umrigar, whose latest collection is, interestingly, titled, "Reign". Its inspiration, however, has nothing to do with her lineage, the designer highlights. Rather, the line — in which Umrigar brings together timeless cuts with powerful hand embroidery — was inspired by the strong female characters of the hit show *Game of Thrones*.

Umrigar, after all, has long been a fan of strong women, and one in particular. "I was always fascinated by how much work my mother put into each outfit," she says, "...by how much attention she paid to every tiny detail. I remember how she would make swatches, and then scrap ideas, and return to the drawing board to come up with entirely new swatches — there was this elaborate, painstaking process... and she'd keep at it until the design appeared to be shaping up exactly the way she had envisioned it." Umrigar believes that's where she learned never to 'make do'.

"As a designer, and in personal life, I would never settle for anything that's not perfect — this is my credo," says Umrigar, who tied the knot with her college sweetheart Dhruv Jouhari in a stunning, much-talked-about wedding in Phuket about four years ago. Since Jouhari's family is based out of Bengaluru, Umrigar now shuttles between the two cities. Like her personal life, her design skills have poured into another world, too. Umrigar now also takes on projects to design interiors, and she's particularly excited about her last project — the revamping and remodelling of a soon-to-open luxury boutique in Bengaluru. "It's nestled in a beautiful bungalow, engulfed in greenery," says the designer, who is delighted with the 'vintage luxury look' she has put together.

If her mother gifted her creativity, Umrigar inherited business skills from her father, Neville, with whom she shares a warm relationship. She says that her father's "bawa humour" can take the edge off even the most stressful work day.

But there are others who inspire and encourage her too, now. "Sonakshi Sinha has been a tremendous source of support," she says, of the actor who was seen wearing one of her designs, when Umrigar had just started out as a designer a couple of years ago. "It was so amazing to see Sonakshi in my gown on the cover of a magazine," says Umrigar, sharing that the picture was shot at her mother's family palace in Hyderabad. "I always envision the women wearing my outfits to be elegant, confident and unafraid to be who they are," says Zara, "...and Sonakshi's the perfect example of that."

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