

New York Fashion Week is heavy on the Latin Flavor

Hispanic designers make their mark on the runway to preview Fall 2014 fashion.

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As the Fall 2014 season kicked off last Thursday, we noticed quite a few aesthetic changes at Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week.

From the layout, new venues and tighter security, some would agree that IMG's plan to make this season at Lincoln Center more selective (in regards to attendees) is working.

Novice designer Karen Gallo, who will debut her luxury footwear and handbag collection on Feb. 12 at Industria Studios, has never presented at Fashion Week, yet she's all for the exclusivity.

"I would make it more exclusive," says the Colombian-born designer, 26. "I used to love the dreaming about getting into a show or wondering what will be next. I feel like anonymity should be part of the industry but unfortunately because of social media it's not."

Gallo was raised in Queens and says she is constantly inspired by New York City and contemporary street style. Her eponymous collection is made in Italy and includes more than 30 pieces made with exotic materials such as calf, embossed crocodile, coated leathers, and pony hair.

When it comes to incorporating his surroundings, New York-based designer Rolando Santana says, "I never intentionally start (to design) with a cultural reference. I generally draw inspiration from many places I get the opportunity to travel to, or from my everyday life."

And it looks like this season Santana is motivated by his Mexican heritage.

"I was inspired by Gabriel Orozco's work," says Santana of the Mexican artist. "His fascination with spaces and the relationships they have with common elements draw him to create works of art that change the world's perception of an object, while maintaining its integral form," adds Santana.

"It is through this very same spirit that the collection has been skillfully crafted using clean lines, seaming detail, intricately placed embellishments throughout."

If Spanish designer Custo Dalmau integrates Latino culture in his designs, he does it

with colors.

"Latin people accept color and it's part of our DNA," says Dalmau.

He's right. His signature use of color blocking, mixing textures, prints and fabrics was seen throughout the runway. Models donned multicolored and geometrical coats - several were half-wool, half-faux fur.

Dalmau included high-waisted flowing skirts, turtlenecks, sheer blouses, and metallic dresses-some accompanied by mirrored aviator sunglasses.

In his current collection, Colombian-born designer Raul Peñaranda says he was inspired by evolution.

Peñaranda, who was raised in Venezuela, says his collection is practical yet elegant - he includes pencil skirts, layering, mixed media trends and adds a touch of metallic sequins, tulle, and brocade.

In addition to Gallo, some new Latino names added to the Fashion Week roster are Hernan Lander, a New York-based Dominican designer, and former model Adrian Alicea, who's Puerto Rican.

"I think we are experiencing a great influx of Latin American talent in the fashion industry," says Santana.

"Aside from the amazing names that we all know, there are great young Latino editors in top glossy publications such as *W* and *Vogue*, and many designers who are an important part of the industry. It is certainly a proud feeling to know that we are all to know that we are all represented in the industry."

Notable designers Carolina Herrera, Oscar de la Renta, Narciso Rodriguez, DelPozo, Angel Sanchez, Cesar Galindo, Ricardo Seco, Ivan Aguilar, JC Obando, and Edwing D'Angelo are also presenting their collections.

Mercedes Sanchez is a style expert and the founder of BeChicMag.com