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Championing Sustainable Fashion Through fbudi

Nico Novito

Among the new guard of fashion designers in Indonesia, Felicia Budi easily stands out. As the founder and creative director of her label fbudi, she is known to consistently experiment with textiles and fabrications in concocting her womenswear collections.

After studying fashion at the London College of Fashion, Felicia worked at a number of fashion houses in the UK and Indonesia — an experience that provided her with an immense insight into the fashion business, traditional textiles and more — before establishing fbudi in late 2010.

Her inclination to create clothes that are experimental and intellectual is evident in her creations so far. For her spring-summer 2015 collection entitled “Persegi” (“Square”), she turned an industrial paper-like Tyvek material into an array of dresses and separates accentuated by pleats and origami-fold accents.

Felicia recently talked to the Jakarta Globe about her design principles, the concept of sustainable fashion and why she envisions her brand to be 100 percent made-in-Indonesia.

Q: How did you get into fashion?

A: I have been interested in the way women dress up since I was little. My favorite subjects in school were art, language and mathematics. I used to dream about working as a scientist for NASA, but I think it was more impossible than becoming a fashion designer. My mother once took me to see a fashion show and I decided that it was the right career path for me. I didn't finish high school and went straight to the London College of Fashion, where I studied fashion design and pattern cutting for four years.

You once worked for fashion houses like ISSA London and BIN House back in Jakarta. How did these stints inform your work at your label fbudi?

When I was interning in London, I learned about the business side of fashion, from its manufacturing, how to make samples, to the review process afterward. I really learned a lot there.

It's different when I came back and worked with BIN House because in Indonesia, the system is mostly dependent on clients and more home-based. But I learned more about textiles, tenun [traditional woven fabric] and coloring so I got in touch with the fabrics directly.

How would you describe your design aesthetic for your fbudi collections?

The brand DNA is intellectual and experimental; we are not about loud designs. Perhaps the people who can really



Felicia Budi, center, with her models at Jakarta Fashion Week 2015. Photo courtesy of Jakarta Fashion Week and Felicia Budi



understand my work are those who have learned to sew, so they know where I experiment with patterns or fabric fiber. I also like to experiment with textures and find new materials. Going forward, I want to focus more on natural fiber because previously we used many synthetic textiles.

What is your creative process in designing a collection?

I often start with the material because I believe each fabric has its own character. So I experiment with that aspect first before shaping it into a piece of clothing. Even when I construct a piece, I drape the material directly on a mannequin — I rarely sketch — and try to explore shapes and silhouettes. This is until I find one that I think is sufficiently good before moving on to the next look.

Black and white always exist in every collection because those are the basic colors that sell well. But I also feature other colors that tend to be pared down because I like a natural look. I never choose bright, bold colors.

How about the production process itself?

I have my own workshop in Jakarta, but my ready-to-wear collection is also simultaneously produced in an outsourced manufacturer. Next, I plan to open a manufacturing place in Bali.

Who do you consider as fbudi's target market?

Women from 25- to 35-years-old. Not that I want to appear elitist, but they are mainly well educated, cultured, well-traveled and well-informed. In short, forward-thinking women.

Where have you marketed your collection so far?

Our collection has been featured in several stores in Jakarta, like Escalier and Galeries Lafayette. We also catered to some private clients. We used to market in Bali before, but we don't do it now. And starting around August or September, an Australian online store will carry fbudi alongside four other Indonesian fashion brands.

A prominent value of your brand is sustainability. Why?

From the beginning, my brand's vision and mission is to contribute to the society, and fashion is merely a medium to achieve that. I am trying to direct my brand to a sustainable future, but it's not just about eco-friendly materials. It's also about community building and empowering local workers. I aim to make fbudi a fully local business, so everything is 100 percent made in Indonesia, from the yarn, the weaving process to the fabrics. But I'm doing this in several stages.

How do you ensure that the workers and craftspeople you employ are treated fairly?

Of course, I have to be involved directly in the production process, from the beginning to end. I do not necessarily control it, but I observe and make sure that there isn't any kind of misconduct.

Do you think the concept of sustainable fashion is growing among your designer peers in Indonesia?

Yes, I think sustainable fashion is in its nascent growth here. I believe sustainability is eventually going to be a very crucial aspect in fashion, and every designer must think about it when making a product. We cannot keep ignoring the current environmental condition. It's not enough for us to simply make something beautiful that people can wear. We have to create sustainable products to sustain our business and survive, too.

What do you think is the biggest challenge faced by Indonesian

designers now?

The biggest challenge is that the fashion system here is still not systematic or integrated — it is as if each designer was working alone. It's very different when I worked in London, where the system is clear and there is an all-encompassing organization like London Fashion Week. The information about the fashion business there was also open and accessible to anyone. Here, there are still too many organizations, each with their own interests and goals. A designer like me also must find out about everything by myself.

What about fashion customers in Indonesia themselves? What is your strategy in reaching them?

We have quite enough customers to sustain my business now, and I hope there will be more in the future. But as a business owner, we also must be smart to not only create something that suits our target market, but also other clothes to reach a wider audience and contribute more revenues.

I always divide a collection of mine. There are some editorial looks that people might not wear every day but are important for my branding. Then, a certain portion of the collection is dedicated to my target market, in which the clothes reflect my idealism. There's also an aseasonal collection, featuring best-seller pieces that I can redo in new material. Lastly, there are wearable looks that can add more revenue. But every single piece must have a common thread in the collection. I don't like fast-moving fashion, so right now I only create collections for the spring-summer season, with small capsule collections in between.

What's your next step for fbudi?

I aim to realize fbudi's vision and mission in more tangible ways, including making each product 100% local. I also want to collaborate with local artists. Just now, I talked with the owner of Na'ni House, an organization that empowers people in Flores, East Nusa Tenggara, through fabric-weaving and natural coloring. I plan to work together with them for my forthcoming collection.

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Check out fbudi.com for more information.

