



# EYES FOR STYLE

Innai Red is designed for success

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**“MY TEAM OF DESIGNERS AT INNAI AND MOST OF MY PRODUCTION UNIT CONSISTS OF WOMEN. AS WOMEN DESIGNING FOR WOMEN, I THINK MY DESIGNERS KNOW HOW TO HANDLE FEMALE SENSITIVITIES, GIVE SOFTER FINISHING AND FRESH DELICATE IDEAS.”**

The first step for one to make it big in the fashion industry is to have an eye for it. If one can foresee future trends to design and produce a collection that will make a woman melt to her feet, then you know you are doing it right. Izrin Ismail is the founder and managing director of the stylish bespoke fashion label, Innai Red under the Innai group of companies. A mother, a business woman and a boss all on her own, Izrin does have her hands tied. But with her extensive background of the industry, there is no surprise that the brand makes heads turn. As Izrin said, “I think it’s every girl’s dream to be in fashion or to be related to the fashion industry. The same goes for me.” Where there is passion, there will always be a way to make things happen.

Izrin took up an intensive course in Fashion Marketing at *Istituto Marangoni* in Milan in 2007 and as they say, the rest is history. She has always been more interested in the business aspect of it rather than designing. But still being the creative lady that she is, she does give ideas and concepts to the collections but she leaves it to her in-house designers and the production team to execute them. And this is where Arene P. Khairudin and Juliani Jamal come in, her two creative designers. Both of them graduated with a fashion certificate and have been in the fashion industry up until Izrin appointed them the task of becoming the creative designers for the brand. We sat down with this imaginative team to get their insights on the fashion industry and how their creative minds work.

**HOW DID YOU THREE STARTED IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY?**

**Izrin:** Innai was founded by my mother, Aishah Saleh. I on the other hand, am her successor. As a start, I was co-handling it with my mother, as I was still studying locally and then to Melbourne to finish off my degree. Even when I was studying overseas, I helped her out with creative works for our production and the

business back home. Before taking over the business from my mother, I observed and learned the tricks and trade of the business. From fully understanding our products (*batik*), the techniques and history, to managing staffs, suppliers, designs, accounts and etcetera. Innai then grew organically and at the same time I was ready to fully concentrate on Innai. Upon my return from Melbourne and with experiences working in the retail line, my mother surrendered the business over to me in 2008, as I was ready to bring Innai to different heights. Four years later, in year 2012, I saw a huge potential in bespoke business here in Malaysia. I was determined to have a diffusion brand under the Innai name, hence Innai Red was born, and Juliani and Arene were made the creative designers of the brand.

**Arene:** I used to work with a few local designers for more than six years after I graduated. I was an assistant to Datuk Radzuan Radziwill for four years and being his assistant really helped me in becoming the designer I am today. I really admire his patience and hard work. I was then hired by Izrin to front the label Innai Red and that was when I met Juliani.

**Juliani:** After graduating, I was in retail for about a year and I also taught fashion design part time at the International Academy of Fashion and Design. I was later offered a position as an assistant designer by Izrin in the early stages of a bespoke line that she recently acquired. And about a year later, Izrin decided to start a new bespoke label which is Innai Red and that was when Arene and I became head designers for Innai Red.

**DID YOU HAVE A PARTICULARLY CREATIVE CHILDHOOD?**

**Izrin:** I wouldn’t say I had a creative childhood. I’ve always been more outgoing and into sports when I was young. I played so many sports that my parents and teachers were very worried of me. But there’s this entrepreneurial business drive in me ever since I was





young. I love to trade and have always been selling things since I was in school. Something I must've inherited from both of my parents who were stockbrokers then.

**Arene:** I have a very creative family. We all love music and arts. All of us can play musical instruments and we just love to play with pencils and papers. My dad hates me playing with the dolls, so secretly; I had to hand sewed most of my doll's dresses just because he wouldn't buy me one!

**Juliani:** My mum is a crafty lady. She made a lot of things for the home and also for me. I've always had the privilege of having my clothes made by my mother when I was younger and I had the freedom to choose and customise things from my bedspread and curtains. We would indulge in craft projects together like making hair clips, clothes for my dolls, and cross stitch.

**EVERYONE HAS TO START SOMEWHERE. WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST JOBS?**

**Izrin:** My first job and the rest after has always been fashion retail. I've had an overall of eight years of retail experience before I fully took over Innai; having to work with Fendi, Louis Vuitton, (Pieno & Sportsgirl in Melbourne) before landed as Topshop's Stylist. My experiences in the retail sector has made me learn the importance of understanding our market segment, servicing clients, branding, merchandising, managing staffs and appreciate the brand's history.

**Arene:** My first job is at the Bead Bar, right after I finished high school. I made accessories out of wooden beads and metals. It was interesting, although it was just for three months.

**Juliani:** I part timed as a retail assistant at Valentino in Starhill during my summer break in university.

**CAN YOU SHARE WITH US ABOUT INNAI RED AND HOW IT ALL CAME ABOUT?**

**Izrin:** Innai Red is a sub-brand of Innai, where we offer bespoke services for elegant and sophisticated evening wear and bridal wear. The line is driven by our design philosophy of creating a new, contemporary femininity. Innai Red was conceived in response to customers' need of scene-stealing gowns and special-occasions wear

that carries Innai's elegant and chic aesthetics. The label is fronted by two young and talented designers; Arene and Juliani. With a combined experience in studying at design schools, and once an apprentices to the best-names in Malaysian fashion, Arene and Juliani are not only equipped with creativity and is skill-wise, they are also armed with a clear understanding of what Malaysians look for and how to offer them without compromising the brand's design integrity. I on the other hand, manage the team and oversee the entire business operations

**WHAT WERE YOUR INSPIRATIONS FOR THE DESIGNS OF YOUR SPRING/SUMMER 2015 COLLECTION?**

**Arene:** I'm all about details and this year we are experimenting with origami constructions, something edgy but sweet at the same time.

**Juliani:** We used the idea of origami as a springboard for our collection. It's an extension from our 2014 'Geometric Girl' collection narrative. What better way to continue the story of geometry than to explore the forms and techniques of origami and infuse it into our designs.

**HOW DO YOU COME ABOUT WITH YOUR DESIGN RESEARCH?**

**Arene:** It depends. Ideas came from everywhere. It can be from a movie, or music, or anything.

**Juliani:** I constantly keep myself busy looking at current and past fashion shows from international designers. I also like to look at the construction of clothes from vintage collections of the fashion greats such as Dior, Balenciaga, and others.

**DO YOU TRY TO KEEP UP WITH THE TRENDS OR DO YOU CREATE YOUR OWN?**

**Arene:** I do keep up with the trends sometimes, but it's always about something that I like and something that I won't regret wearing or seeing it later.

**Juliani:** Our inspiration comes from many places; we do not rely heavily on current or future trends. Partly because we are a bespoke label, it's not fast fashion where there is a fast turnaround, so I believe it's more important to design something timeless.

**WHO DO YOU DESIGN FOR AND WHY?**

**Izrin:** Innai Red designs for women who like to wear their clothes with confidence, event appropriate, has her own signature style, and would invest in timeless pieces and quality. Our designs are driven by our philosophy of creating a new, contemporary femininity. My team of designers at Innai and most of my production unit consists of women. As women designing for women, I think my designers know how to handle female sensitivities, give softer finishing and fresh delicate ideas. Although this is rather subjective, because a good designer will do any kind of work, may it be delicate, grungy, dark or light.

**INNAI RED RANGES FROM BRIDAL WEAR TO SEASONAL COLLECTIONS AND EVEN RAYA WEAR. THIS MUST MEAN THAT YOU THREE WORK A LOT. HOW DO YOU FIND TIME AND INSPIRATION TO DESIGN FOR ALL THESE COLLECTIONS?**

**Arene:** We always plan ahead. We usually would start four months before launching the collection.

**Juliani:** Time management is very important, so we always plan ahead. Besides that, having a good team really helps in getting things done like clockwork.

**HOW DO YOU BALANCE CREATIVITY WITH COMMERCE?**

**Izrin:** How I keep my labels relevant is by catering to the demands. In fashion, we don't really introduce innovation, we re-create and beautify trends. We follow trends that are forecasted, tweak them, and adapt them into our collection. Fashion repeats itself and is ever-changing. Therefore to be in fashion business; we need to follow an accelerated fashion cycle and have a clear understanding of the market's demand. And in terms of commercialising our product, targeting a niche market as a start is always best. I made sure that our product has an 'original' factor to it, good finishing, start with exclusive quantities and make sure that it's different to our competitors.

**Arene:** We always design something that's relevant. It's not just about designing a collection, but being able to sell it too.

**Juliani:** One should always have a target

market in mind and one's design should be relevant to the target market.

**HOW DO YOU THREE ALL COME TO A DECISION THAT A COLLECTION IS COMPLETE OR A CERTAIN PIECE HAS GONE THROUGH ENOUGH DESIGNING?**

**Izrin:** We would normally sit for a final meeting and look through the collection to see that it is cohesive and whether it needs tweaking.

**Arene:** We usually would sit down and discuss before designing a collection, we always make sure that our designs blends well together.

**Juliani:** It usually is made midway through the production of the collection. That's when we can see if we would need certain highlights or basic pieces to be added into the collection or if certain pieces need tweaking or not.

**WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME REAL HIGHLIGHTS OF YOUR JOURNEY SO FAR?**

**Izrin:** My fondest memory about my brand and what I do is that customers tend to remember me as 'Innai' rather than Izrin. They introduce me as Innai to their friends, and people tend to think that's my name. Other memorable highlights in my career was when I was selected as one of the stylish individuals in "20 most Glam in 2010", "Raymond Weil's Noemia Recipient in 2010", nominated as "Cosmopolitan Fun, Fearless & Fabulous in 2010", "Harper's Bazaar Most Stylish in 2011", "Gc Smart Luxury Personality Campaign in 2012", and "The Malaysian Women's Weekly Great Women of Our Time Awards in 2013" among others. These are indeed luxurious moments for me as it just comes to show that I am known and appreciated for the business I grow and believe in.

**Arene:** Fronting a line is no easy task, but I was happy that our first collection with Innai Red was well received. Seeing the collections on the runway gives me a sense of accomplishment.

**Juliani:** Our debut fashion show when we launched the label and also our debut participation in KL Fashion Week.

**DOES YOUR WORK REFLECT ON YOUR PERSONAL FASHION TASTE? HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE YOUR FASHION AND STYLE?**

**Izrin:** My personal style is effortlessly chic. I know my style because my style becomes part of my brands which in

fashion business, is critical. My personal style is like an advertisement about who I am and what I stand for. I normally incorporate trends into my wardrobe and make them my own. We must know that not all trend suits us, so we need to be careful about our choice of garments, accessories, colours and cuts which should be appropriate for our figure, features and lifestyle.

**Arene:** I'm a t-shirt and jeans kind of girl, but sometimes I do love to dress up. When it comes to designing a line, it's always a mixture of something that I would love to see myself in it too.

**Juliani:** Yes it does. I like feminine details and elegant silhouettes.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE FASHION SCENE IN MALAYSIA TODAY?**

**Izrin:** Malaysians fashion choices and style has strongly inclined into the fast fashion frenzy. People seem to have lost their sense of individuality. Everyone simply looks the same. Unfortunately for us, this is where the market lies. People preach about how they savour their individuality and want to stick out, but in reality they just want to fit in. This is what fashion does to most of us. To be original, is to look ordinary for most fashion enthusiasts. We are overwhelmed with choices when it comes to fashion and its trends. So we really need to be smart with our purchases and balance fads with pieces that would give us more longevity.

**Arene:** It's a healthy competition between us designers with different types of styles and directions. There are so many talented designers in Malaysia that I think should be given a chance to expose themselves and be recognised internationally.

**Juliani:** It's definitely evolving. There are a lot more young upcoming talents in the fashion industry making it more competitive. Plus, healthy competition is always good to keep us on our toes.

**WHAT IS NEXT FOR INNAI RED?**

**Izrin:** We will be working on our Raya 2015 collection and a capsule collection right after. Our future plan is all about expansion and branding. We hope to create a strong ready-to-wear line and have stockists, either departmental or multi-brand stores overseas. And even participate in International fashion trade fairs like Tranoi or even debut at international fashion weeks. MM

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