



Indian-American engineer-turned-fashion designer Shelley Chhabra, center, is bringing Raj-worthy Indian-style fashions to Massachusetts. Here, she wears a deep blue-purple pure sheer-silk and silk-lined tunic with slim-slim pants and wrap, all accented with iridescent silvery and lavender-blue sequin- and-bead flower accents. Surrounding her, models from Indian, Indian-American and Western backgrounds show that her fashions in a rainbow of colors and variety of accents can complement every complexion, size and fashion-sense. Among the models are Chhabra's friend and "one-time-only model" Renita Bhatta, second from right, daughter of the owners of the Tandoori Grill restaurant in Marlborough, and Linda Cole, far right, daughter of Yolanda Celucci, the owner of Yolanda's Bridal in Waltham where Chhabra's fashions will be sold.

Indian look may be all the Raj

By Diane Baltozer

Ultra-simple yet elegant wedding gowns have been the rage for more than a few seasons of late. But the rich, elaborate look of the Indian Raj may soon be the rage at weddings as young designer Shelley Chhabra brings Indian sari and other traditional Indian styles and Indian-American fusion styles to brides, bridal parties and wedding guests via Yolanda's bridal salon in Waltham.

Chhabra, who is of Indian descent but was born in the U.S., has a degree in electrical engineering and a had successful, high-powered job as a senior analyst for the Yankee group. But "the whole time I yearned to be more creative," she said, and, about three months ago, she decided to switch careers and her focus to designing and importing high-end, handmade Indian fashions to the United States, especially for wedding fashions. It wasn't entirely an unexpected career change for her, however — her family has been in the Indian fashion business for three generations. "They own 40 outlets based in India" that produce "fashions for all the festivities that Indian women would need" for multiday Indian weddings or

many other upscale, dress-up events, Chhabra said.

Chhabra's family business gave her a way to produce her designs when Chhabra decided to switch careers. And when she recently showed her fashions to Yolanda Celucci, owner of Yolanda's in Waltham, her fashions were such a hit with Yolanda that she decided to add them to her bridalwear and designer-wear repertoire for her fashion-conscious upscale customers.

There's a large Indian and Indian-American community in Massachusetts that's a big part of an ever-growing "global market," said Yolanda at a recent fashion opening showcasing Chhabra's fashions. Yolanda predicts that Chhabra's collection of customizable, upscale designs mark "a return to glamour" in bridal fashion after a long spell of interest in ultra-simple bridal gowns and dressy-occasion wear — and for all women, Western or Eastern.

Chhabra's designs include traditional and very dressy Indian sari styles, ultra-dressy pants-and-tunic styles and also "fusion" designs which mix the best of Indian and Western looks with the lavishly beautiful colors captured in rich Indian silks and

hand-beading.

Chhabra's fashions spell "exciting," "ultra-feminine" and "glamorous" to long-time bridal salon owner Yolanda. And they may well tempt her clientele looking for something different and individual for their wedding.

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The Indian-inspired fashions offer another alternative to traditional white or pastel American looks for weddings or fancy-dress events.

Chhabra herself oversees not just the design of her fashions, but also where the pure silk

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comes from in India, and who does the hand sewing and "all-hand-beading" of her fashions. And she will customize her designs for customers, from the design and cut of a look to the dyeing of the silk to the bead-

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