

He puts sketches and mood boards on the table and the first thing I notice is the colour – beautiful, bright colours, in every colour of the colour wheel. And there are animal prints; yellow, orange, brown and black leopard spots and white and black zebra stripes. I am intrigued but not surprised because colours are the trademark of Zawi. Zawi has been influential in the fashion world for the unexpected ways in which it combines colour, fabric and texture. Matthew starts to talk me through the sketches. “This is our show opener,” holding up a sketch of a zebra-inspired calf-length coat with a black, white and purple iris print simple dress. He points to the mood board. “My mum had a flowerbed full of the most beautiful irises; Lizelle sketched irises and we used her sketches to develop a print for the dress.” Lizelle is the expert on fabrics; she develops the techniques and processes required to bring Matthew’s creations to life. This is not an easy task as the design duo believe in looking after the planet, so they use only sustainable fabrics and techniques in all their designs.



Lizelle takes over the conversation with a smile and an elegant wave of her hand. “My aim for this collection is to use organic ethical cotton produced in Africa for all the fabrics, plus we are trialling African ethical silk for our chiffons. The silk is produced by a community project supporting rural women.” Lizelle passes me swatches of fabric. I feel the chiffon, which has a leopard-print base with spiky bright pink, purple and blue flowers and green leaves. The silk is very soft and the colours very bright, characteristics of pure silk. There are also samples of cotton used for the coats and some of the dresses. There is a wide range of texture and handle (drape) and the leopard spots have been woven into the cotton fabric giving a bumpy feel to the otherwise soft fabric. “The zebra print cotton is thick but soft due to the finishing techniques applied,” Lizelle explains. “The comfort factor of our garments is very important to us because we want our clients to be happy – especially considering how much they pay for our garments.”

Matthew continues to talk me through the collection. He shows me sketch after sketch of beautiful, simple and elegant garments. A large focus of the collection is on coats. They are elaborately appliqued with animals and flowers in bright colours for dramatic effect. Zawi is known for simple styles with extensive use of texture; 3D flowers are applied to necklines, feathers to hemlines with exquisite attention to detail.

Matthew shows me a mood board of the final dress of the collection. “We are closing the show with drama. Our finale evening dress is a peacock-styled gown in cool colours of blues and greens with a bodice embellished with peacock feathers.” Matthew explains that the extremely full fluted three-tiered skirt is based on the fan-like appearance of the tail feathers of a male peacock strutting his stuff.

From looking at the sketches, mood boards and samples of fabric I have no doubt in my mind that come tomorrow Zawi will once again be one of the foremost design houses at London Fashion Week.

