Wes Gordon Honored by FIT Couture Council

The designer is energized about the future and the return to in-person events.

BY ROSEMARY FEITELBERG

Before being honored by the Couture Council of The Museum at FIT on Tuesday, Wes Gordon discussed the occasion, celebratory dressing and the power of reflectiveness.

Before 240 guests arrived at Cipriani South Street for the annual event, the Carolina Herrera creative director said in a phone interview, “We’ve been waiting for 18 months to get back to doing all this fun stuff, so now we’ve got it. I’m not going to complain.”

Having attended FIT’s Couture Council luncheon many times and watched designers who he admires receive the Couture Council award for fashion and artistry, he said, “It’s very surreal for me to be here today as a recipient.”

The crowd, which was reduced in half due to safety precautions, included Carolina Herrera, Patricia Lansing, Stacey Bendet Eislner, Nicole Miller, B. Michael, Dr. Joyce Brown, Fe Feidli, Valerie Steele and Julie Macklowe, among others, organizers said. Shanina Shaik presented the award to Gordon. The Nordstrom-sponsored event was co-chaired by Jeffrey Fowler and Carolina Herrera president Emile Rubinfeld, and nearly $700,000 was raised.

The 40th anniversary of Carolina Herrera and the recent return of its in-person runway show were just two of the reasons Gordon had to celebrate. He dedicated the award to the company’s namesake, according to organizers. As a champion of New York City, its fashion sector, and the reopening of both, Gordon was on board with the return of Tuesday’s luncheon in-person and a few other safely handled events. “There’s a palpable joy that you can feel in these situations and in these rooms that comes just from togetherness. Fashion is a community. Fashion is a family. It is not at its best when we are all forced to be apart. We’re a group whether it’s students, teachers, clients, designers, media or retailers who are in this business because we love what we do. We love being with other people, who love what they do,” he said.

The Chicago-born, New York-based Gordon was raised in Atlanta and has insights into other U.S. markets, which Carolina Herrera has “always had robust businesses in,” he said. “What you saw during the pandemic more than areas shifting in importance because of demographics and populations changing was more to do with how different regions were affected by and dealing with the pandemic and closures. There were certain markets where we were selling very strongly throughout the entirety and then other regions where things were very much on hold.”

Currently, celebratory clothes are ringing up sales. More specifically, that means “clothes that mark moments or turn an ordinary moment into an unforgettable moment. Whether those are weddings that have been postponed and it’s a very formal situation. Or it [could be] as simple as having six girlfriends over for dinner in your backyard for a belated birthday and you just want a fabulous cotton dress. We’re really seeing emotional shopping. Women are looking for pieces that really speak to them and connect with them because they went through an extended period of time not being able to enjoy and celebrate the transformative power of fashion.”

While all categories are selling, dresses are popular. Another offshoot of the lockdown-induced pause for Gordon and for other designers led to “some introspection and soul searching about who we are as designers and what our houses represent to women that they can’t get other places. And to start shifting away from this cycle of more, more, faster, faster, faster. So we’re making a small percentage of pieces. That means that each thing that we create has to be fabulous. It has to communicate Carolina Herrera. It has to communicate to our customer, our woman and emotionally resonate with her.”

Noting how resilient the fashion community is, Gordon was energized
that the luncheon was happening. “But just like New York, the fashion family is unstoppable – the fashion media and the retailers are unstoppable. And we persevere,” he said.