

Vivek Karunakaran Rediscovered His Roots with 'IDAM' at the Chettinad Heritage Festival

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At the **fourth edition of the Chettinad Heritage Festival** held recently in Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu, **fashion designer Vivek Karunakaran** took a symbolic bow in a red palazzo-veshti hybrid paired with a double-breasted jacket. Embroidered jasmine flowers trailed along the sleeve—small but powerful details that told a deeper story.

“The jasmine appliqué runs from wrist to elbow, a traditional Tamil unit of length called *muzham*. It reflects how flower-sellers hold jasmine strands,” explains the **Chennai-based designer**. “The motifs on the back of another jacket mirror the flowers women wear in their plaits.”

These personal and cultural markers formed the emotional core of his new collection, **'IDAM'**, which translates to “a place where you belong” in Tamil.

Celebrating the Self and the South

After **18 years of his eponymous label**, Karunakaran conceived *IDAM* as an ode to his city and state — Chennai and Tamil Nadu. “It is a celebration of its language, its history, and the wisdom that flows through its very soul,” he says.

The presentation took place at **Chidambara Vilas**, a 118-year-old Chettiar mansion, where ornate teak pillars and Athangudi tiled floors amplified the spirit of homecoming.

Born in Thiruvananthapuram and trained at NIFT Chennai, Karunakaran has always sought to **elevate South Indian design narratives**. “It’s about moving beyond the stereotypical idli-sambar-temples image and showcasing the depth of our aesthetic heritage,” he emphasizes.

A Southern Accent in Modern Form

The *IDAM* collection draws richly from Tamil Nadu’s architecture, textiles, and philosophy. The **red-and-white palette** mirrors the stripes of the region’s temple walls. **Jasmine motifs, Madras checks, and Tamil script appliqué** bring local icons to life in new textures and silhouettes.

Traditional **veshtis**—often seen as domestic or political attire—were reimagined as **luxurious silk drapes with Kanjeevaram borders, organza temple motifs, and embroidered cutwork edges**. “I wanted to reintroduce the veshti as something elegant, formal, and globally relevant,” says Karunakaran. “Imagine pairing it with a trench coat or a

bandhgala on the red carpet.”

With *IDAM*, Karunakaran delivers a masterclass in cultural revivalism—a contemporary fashion lexicon deeply rooted in southern identity.

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