

A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a white kurta with pink floral embroidery and a pink and white striped sari. She is looking to the left. She has gold earrings, a ring, and bangles.

GENTLE GRATIFICATION

Anavila Misra, popularly known for her minimalistic sensibilities and linen saris, has freshly launched 'First Blush', her take on festive wear. She fields questions from **Bindu Gopal Rao** regarding the collection.



Known designer Anavila Misra's career trajectory follows an interesting graph. She studied Knitwear Design from National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), New Delhi—after studying business management—and graduated in the year 2000. Her first job was as Assistant Designer for Louis Philippe at Madura Garments. In 2004, she began working on a craft cluster-development project for NIFT in association with the Ministry of Rural Development. She believes in organic materials that are soft and comfortable on the body. Her handwoven linen saris are simple yet gorgeous and wonderful; so much so that they have become her trademark drapes. Misra's signature elegant linen saris made in muted colours by women weavers in Jharkhand has many takers across the country. Her saris have been worn by a plethora of celebrities including the likes of Dia Mirza, Kiran Rao, Kajol, Sonali Bendre and Nandita Das, among others.

Her most recent collection, 'First Blush' was exclusively launched at Good Earth in four cities, namely New Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Hyderabad. With this collection, Anavila has lent her linen drapes a festive spin, introducing techniques such as printing, *khatwa*, and pleating that create subtle textures and flowy silhouettes, all in a palette of vermilion, cinnamon, and soft hues of pink and cardamom. She tells us more about her journey in this exclusive tête-à-tête.

MISRA'S SIGNATURE ELEGANT LINEN SARIS MADE IN MUTED COLOURS BY WOMEN WEAVERS IN JHARKHAND HAS MANY TAKERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

HOW DID YOU VEER TOWARDS FASHION? WHEN DID YOU REALISE IT WAS YOUR CALLING?

Design and textiles have always been my lifelong interests. My sister and I used to play dress-up, for which my mother generously lent us her saris. I always had a keen interest in design, which manifested in many ways during my childhood. I used to design clothes for myself and my dolls. Under the guidance of my mother, I learnt embroidery, knitting, sewing, and painting at home. And my father's love for everything natural—for instance, our well-kept garden and kitchen gardens—has had a strong role to play in brewing my love for nature, and all things raw and organic. So choosing my path was quite easy, thanks to the support and encouragement I received at home. When I was working on the craft cluster development project, I travelled the length and breadth of rural craft clusters and that is when I saw the immense possibility they

INTERVIEW

held. I feel that my business studies gave me a base to organise my work in a certain way and a firm grounding on how to look at the other side of things. They helped me to structure and plan my time and work. We even created a brand and store under the project.

PLEASE ELABORATE ON LINEN BEING YOUR MEDIUM OF CHOICE.

In the beginning of my journey as a designer, I worked extensively on menswear brands; I spent much of my time with linen textiles. The raw luxury of linen stayed with me and was a natural choice when I started creating my own design language.

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TELL US ABOUT ‘FIRST BLUSH’ AND WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE.

As the name suggests, it is the first step into celebration—romantic and soft. For this collection, the silhouettes are comfortable but chic. This season also features a unique play of colours and patterns to pick up on. We have experimented with some unusual colour combinations, stark solid contrasts, different hues of the same colour, varying stripes, and slight splashes of gold and silver.

APART FROM LINEN, WHAT KIND OF MATERIALS DO YOU LIKE TO WORK WITH, AND WHY?

I mostly work with linen because of its natural properties, comfort, and raw elegance. In my latest collection, we have used linen and silk, embellished with delicate zari embroidery and signature *khatwa* appliqué work.

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE COLOUR PALETTE FOR YOUR COLLECTIONS?

For our 2019 festive collection, we wanted to incorporate a palette of both subtle and bright colours. The range has been carefully chosen





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keeping in mind the tones and hues that complement Indian complexions. Not only are the colours in sync with skin tones of Indian women but they are also well-associated with festivities and celebrations. We want to introduce colour palettes that are appropriate for the season and create a fresh line of quintessential Anavila designs with a simple yet bold twist.

WHAT ARE THE NEW TRENDS THAT YOU SEE UNFOLDING THIS YEAR?

I see comfort taking centre stage in our clothing choices this year.

HOW RELEVANT IS THE SARI AS A GARMENT TODAY?

The sari is and will always be relevant because of its versatility, grace, and unlimited possibilities with which one can express oneself by wearing it. Today, the sari has developed and been modified to suit the tastes, needs, and interests of people all over the country. Hence, with so many relevant design options, it is once again becoming more and more popular.

WHERE DO YOU DERIVE YOUR INSPIRATION FROM?

Travel, of course, has always been a huge source of inspiration for me. I travel across the rural clusters of the country, meeting artisans, spending time with them, and going through their product cycles and processes. It gives a different perspective to my understanding of handcrafted methods and opens my mind up to the immense possibilities of working with Indian textiles. For instance, the inspiration for my Spring Summer 2019 collection came from the culturally rich, aesthetically strong, and naturally beautiful Sa Pa region of Vietnam. Their lifestyle, natural environment, and inherent love for textile art formed the basis of my work.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR ASSOCIATION WITH GOOD EARTH.

We have been closely associated with Good Earth for the last few years. I feel that our design sensibilities, which are rooted in Indian culture, match with those of Good Earth at a number of levels. ■