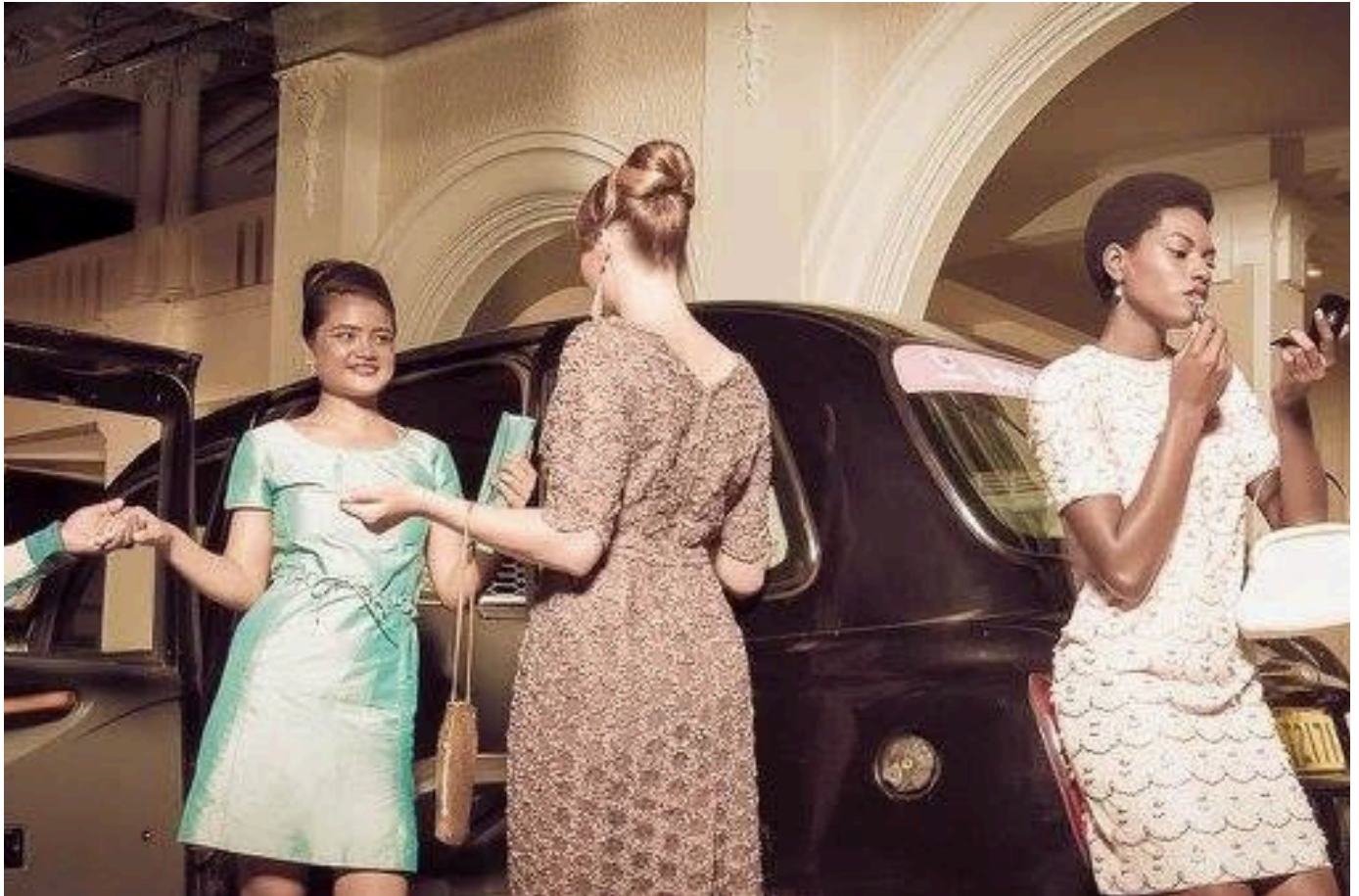


A century of fashion

LocalNews|Published:May2,2014|LastUpdated:May2,2014 | By FijiTimes



THE date is Saturday, May 23, 1914 and the guests have arrived for the opening of what was to be the Crown Jewel of the Pacific — the Grand Pacific Hotel.

The Governor at the time, Sir Ernest Bickham Sweet-Escott, stood by to conduct the formalities of the day as the full heat of the tropical sun seared through the delicate parasols of the mainly Caucasian colonial line-up.

The women are in their Edwardian heavily embellished finery, the dress of the day was ankle bound, formal, layered, rigged with boned corsets laced so tightly they could barely breath. The bra had just been invented by American Mary Jacobs and the opening date was merely three months away from the breakout of the First World War.

In contrast, the bare feet natives and locals who lined the streets of Victoria Parade wearing the less costly version of the current fashions of the day in much cheaper cloth bore the full brunt of the overhead sun.

Circumvent 100 years and it is Thursday, May 29, 2014, and the guests are now seated at the restored majestic Grand Pacific Hotel.

Fiji Fashion Week will celebrate 100 years of fashion bringing you back to the modern contemporary fashions of the current day.

With the definite intention of targeting the tourism industry, FJFW has introduced the resort wear show that will promote designers of ready-to-wear, beach-wear, swim-wear, including summer dresses suited to tourists and locals.

Fashion is evolving constantly, its seasons, styles, colours and accessories that make up a multi-billion dollar industry, which is what we use every day to make statements in our offices, homes and communities with the clothes we wear.

There is good fashion and then there's the bad fashion that leaves you looking at your parents' pictures from yonder years and thinking "what were you thinking, Mom and Dad?"

It is all part of the fashion evolution, sometimes you get it wrong and then there are those moments that are nailed so perfectly, it's etched in fashion history like Gabrielle Bonheur (Coco) Chanel timeless designs of trademark suits and little black dresses.

There is an air of anticipation in Suva as one of Fiji's historic and iconic landmarks finishes its restoration journey and opens its doors to the public of Fiji.

It's exactly 22 years since the Grand Pacific Hotel closed its doors in 1992 but most importantly, it is home to the 7th Fiji Fashion Week.

Fiji Fashion Week managing director Ellen Whippy Knight said there would never be another moment like this in Fijian history.

"You only turn 100 once and Fiji Fashion Week is giving Fijians the opportunity to celebrate 100 years of fashion by purchasing your tickets to Fiji Fashion Week and experiencing the historic ambience that is Grand Pacific Hotel. We are the first event there that has full access to the hotel," said Ms Whippy-Knight.

The Grand Pacific Hotel was also home to most affluent Fijian citizens in its glory days and it is a nostalgic journey one takes when you peruse old pictures of the hotel.

"It's simply fantastic when you look at those Fijian women dressed in that vintage style in the '50s and '60s and that's what we're celebrating, it's the vintage fashion that goes hand in hand with the Grand Old lady, we want people to come and experience that," she said.

“Our opening night is resort wear night, it’s fabulous beach-wear, kaftans and island wear and we encourage not only tourists but our patrons to support our local economy.”

Designed to catch the cooling tradewinds, The Grand Pacific Hotel was built by the Union Steamship Company in 1914 to serve the needs of their passengers en route to other destinations.

The hotel was also built on the landing spot for the original Suva village, called Vunivesi after the trees nearby.

Fiji fashionistas will tread the same grounds where the world famous author James A Michener wrote in his 1992 “And then came the target of my trip” to Fiji: one of the memorable hotels of the world, the Grand Pacific Hotel”.

Then there was the great Australian aviator, Sir Charles Kingsford Smith, who quite literally dropped out of the sky and into Albert Park on the first transpacific flight between the US and Australia in 1928 and then casually walked across Albert Park into the Grand Pacific hotel for a much needed drink.

But by far, the GPH’s most distinguished guests were a young Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh making their celebrated first visit to the Colony of Fiji in 1953 where they waved from the balcony to the thousands who had lined the streets of Victoria Parade and across Albert Park.

Tickets to Fiji Fashion Week are available from Damodar City.

* Neisau Tuidraki is the Fiji Fashion Week public relations manager. The view expressed in this article does not reflect that of this newspaper, and it’s solely hers and FJFW.