

Life

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Live more.
Bank less.

*I see my purpose
in life as making
the world a happier
place to be in.*

David Niven



Project virtual runway

Get in the front row at Singapore's first virtual fashion festival, which features 31 local and 10 regional labels



Amanda Chai

Your opportunity to feel like a fashion editor is here, at Singapore's first virtual fashion festival, The Front Row.

Conceptualised by fashion veteran Daniel Boey, 55, the festival recreates a fashion week experience online at thefrontrow.style. The event kicked off yesterday and will run till Aug 29.

The online portal houses a 3D festival village which visitors can navigate to virtually attend runway shows, panels, workshops and podcasts.

On show are 31 local and 10 regional labels – "designers we felt have the pulse on the future, who know how to adapt no matter what the economy throws at them", Boey tells The Straits Times.

From his office in Ubi, the creative director cuts a striking figure in a purple suit and his signature square-framed glasses – fitting for someone often called the godfather of Singapore fashion.

He had the idea in April, around the time the circuit breaker was extended. Since March, his team, Daniel Boey Creatives, had been working on adapting the annual Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts fashion show to partly virtual event.

When the circuit breaker was extended by a month, he saw the potential to expand it to a festival for all to attend.

"Every other industry was coming together – music, theatre, food. Rather than wait for things to happen, we thought, let's try and



make things happen on our own."

With no tech knowledge, he reached out to friends and contacts who could help with digitising his grand ideas. An acquaintance from digital agency AP Media answered his plea.

The company had prior experience turning the Singapore Heritage Festival into an online event in June and knew exactly what he had in mind, says Boey.

"It couldn't be a 2D website – it had to be immersive, to recreate as much of the excitement of a real festival as possible," he says, adding that they took inspiration from the interactivity of role-playing video games.

To simulate moving through rooms and "realistic landscapes", the 360-degree festival village has zones modelled after Singapore's cityscape.

For instance, in the Runway Room, a modern re-creation of the former National Theatre which was demolished in 1986, visitors can watch runway shows, while a kopi-tiam modelled on the now-closed heritage confectionery Chin Mee Chin is a space for accessing podcasts, panel discussions and styling workshops.

All the events run on a schedule and after each day, they will be archived for easy reviewing, with the portal remaining up for 12 months.

You can shop too. It will be like a "virtual shopping festival meets fashion festival", with links to the brands' e-stores if you like what you see on the runway, says Boey.

"We wanted to try and help the designers with their sales as well," he adds.

The collections are presented as pre-filmed runway shows, fashion videos and short films, which last from three to 10 minutes.

During the festival, designers will appear in a live stream after their shows to take questions and talk about their collections.

Some shows – like those of home-grown designers Max Tan and Gin Lee – were staged and filmed here.

The two shows were shot in local art galleries.

Others were remotely produced by the designers abroad, such as Melbourne-based Singaporean designer Jude Ng, who filmed his docu-show in his showroom before the current lockdown.

Having had the "luxury of studying the success and failures" of brands which went online early in the pandemic, Boey believes The Front Row will be more than just a "glossy TV commercial".

The 360-degree festival village in The Front Row has zones modelled after Singapore's cityscape, such as the Runway Room (above), which is a modern re-creation of the former National Theatre that was demolished in 1986. The virtual fashion festival was conceptualised by Daniel Boey (left). PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE FRONT ROW, JOEL CHAN

ONLINE FASHION FESTIVAL CASTS SPOTLIGHT ON DESIGNERS OF THE FUTURE continued on C2