

A model hunt

EVENT *Doctors, architects, engineers... the aspirants to the Face of 2010 contest are from varied backgrounds*

If you stand like this," says Atul Kelkar, gently and patiently — his chest is out, stomach sucked in, shoulders drawn tautly back; he is the quintessential caricature of the catwalk model — "you will look like a tree." A pause. "We don't want to look like trees." Another pause. "Breathe."

The group he's grooming looks visibly relieved. The 30 men and women who have come to Chennai with stars in their eyes are the finalists of the national model hunt, the Face of 2010, by Anushka Salon and Spa. From Kashmir to Kerala, they've beaten more than 400 contestants in seven cities to be here.

It all began when Shibani Vasun-



THUMBS UP FOR TALENT Participants at the Face of 2010 contest PHOTO: M. KARUNAKARAN

dan, riffling through portfolios and resumes for a new face for her Anushka Salon, realised there was nothing new in what they had. "And this, while there is an absolute glut of models in places like Mumbai," she adds. "So we decided to bring them all together on a national platform, and see what we got."

They got a motley crew — just among the final 20 women and 10 men, there are doctors, architects, engineers, even a chef. "Several Fashion Weeks have approached us already — our winners in the cat-

walk rounds will walk the ramp for them," says Shibani. All of them have been groomed for more than five days, and will be dressed by top designers for the finals today. "We're surprised at how talented the lot we've found are — we have singers, artists and even a belly dancer!"

"This is the kind of thing that rarely comes to Chennai," says Sreechitra, one of the contestants. "It's an opportunity we're enormously grateful for — to be groomed and dressed by some of

the industry's best."

"Pageants may come and go, but what we need right now are specialists. For instance, why are the shorter models marginalised everywhere? For hair models, their height or fluency in English might be of no consequence whatsoever," says Atul. "We also said age and marital status were no bar. To top it all, there will be no one single winner, because it is unfair to assess them on one criterion alone. There will be eight — best hair, best skin and two each in the cate-

gories of Catwalk, Fashion Print, TV Commercial. They've also been asked to introduce themselves in their mother tongues for the finals, because most pageants are unfairly biased against speakers of regional languages." This was also probably why the response they received to their auditions was enormous; there were applications even from the U.K.

Sneha Ramesh, another contestant, agrees that the grooming sessions have been helping. "And it's great that there's no particular winner."

"I'm constantly being asked — why Chennai? I say, why not?" smiles Atul. "We want to create Chennai as the next destination for models. In fact, we had to sit and counsel the parents of several participants, telling them not to worry, that their children were going to be taken care of."

"The interest has been tremendous from the models as well as the industry — so we will be back next year as well," laughs Shibani. "There's so much talent that needs to be unearthed. But over and above that, it is a conscious move towards understanding fashion as art in the city."

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