Senior wins $25,000 for rolling clothing store idea

By Ted Boscia

For his vision of a nomadic fashion apparel truck that would pass through cities nationwide selling his hybrid gender-neutral clothing line, fiber science and apparel design senior John Sohn has won a $25,000 Geoffrey Beene National Scholarship from the YMA Fashion Scholarship Fund.

Sohn's idea, GYP-C (pronounced "gypsy"), emulates the model of food trucks roving the streets of his native Southern California, many relying on tweets and Facebook updates to signal their whereabouts to local foodies. Along with the business concept, Sohn created a collection of trendy garments that would appeal to both male and female shoppers. His itinerant store would also offer accessories, electronics, vintage collectibles and fragrances derived from flowers in the states GYP-C visits.

"The store is the spectacle -- that's what makes fashion fun," Sohn said. "It's inspired by gypsy travelers, who would settle in locations for short periods of time and then move on. The goal of this mobile store is to immerse the customer in the brand and to immerse the brand in the customer."

As one of eight finalists for the award, Sohn pitched his plan for the store of the future to a panel of judges composed of fashion industry titans. Unable to bring props to the meeting, he wore pieces from his line. Sohn spoke for 20 minutes, then was grilled on his GYP-C concept.

"The pitch was intense," Sohn said. "We were in a boardroom on the 18th floor of the Waldorf Astoria. These were CEOs who had probably already heard every presentation out there. Once I got into it, though, all my preparation and hard work paid off."

At a Jan. 11 gala in New York City, Sohn and three other students received the $25,000 top prize -- the second win in three years by a Cornell fashion design student. Sohn plans to spend the funds on his senior runway collection and possibly to pursue a fashion design internship in Europe after graduation.

Just as valuable was the exposure to top fashion designers and business minds, said Sohn, who has previously interned with such labels as Phi, The Row and Richard Chai. In an article in the next day's Wall Street Journal, Sohn drew praise for his "chutzpah" after he approached a table of fashion luminaries, opened a conversation and offered his business card.

Fiber Science & Apparel Design (FSAD) associate professor Van Dyk Lewis, who mentored Sohn during the competition along with FSAD senior lecturer Anita Racine, said: "The praise was incredible and positive. The industry's leading decision makers were extremely impressed with
John's ideas, the physical work and the poise of his presentation."

In addition to the Geoffrey Beene scholarship, Sohn's work has appeared on the runway at the 2010 Arts of Fashion international student competition, and he earned a Barbara L. Kuhlman Inc. fiber arts scholarship in 2009 and YMA Fashion Scholarship awards in 2009 and 2010.

"John's outstanding design vision is fueled by his tenacity to build a strong educational foundation for his career in fashion design," said Racine. "His talent and solid Cornell work ethic will continue to propel him upward in the fashion field."

To view more pieces and sketches from Sohn's GYP-C line, visit http://www.johnsohn.com/competition/geoffrey-beene.

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