

How a Small Film Festival Can Create a Big Reach

The inaugural event, "Dressing Down the Movies," combines fashion and film as part of the cultural programming offered by the Bal Harbour Shops' new Fashion Project.



Tui Pranich, whose firm Tui Lifestyle specializes in design of luxury condominiums, designed the 1,000-square-foot screening room.

Photo: [Silvia Ros](#)

By Beth Kormanik Posted September 1, 2015, 7:15 AM EDT

Film buffs and fashion lovers can find common ground at [Bal Harbour Shops](#), the luxury shopping center that is hosting a 48-day film festival. Running through September 30, the festival, called "Dressing Down the Movies: Nat Chediak on Fashion" is screening films selected by the founder of the Miami Film Festival.

The event is the latest offering from the recently launched Fashion Project, a slate of cultural programming that Cathy Leff, former director of Miami's [Wolfsonian-FIU](#) museum, conceived and implemented for Bal Harbor Shops and owner Whitman Family Development. Bal Harbour

approved of the concept in December and the venue opened in mid-April with its first exhibition. She says the purpose is to fill a void in the neighborhood for cultural events.

“It’s programmed and conceived to be about fashion—the DNA of what Bal Harbour Shops is all about,” Leff says. “In proposing the idea, nobody in Miami owns fashion as a full-time cultural offering. Fashion was more than the selling of beautiful things. It speaks to innovation, identity, aspiration, design, creativity. We wanted to look at fashion through a multidisciplinary lens.”

At the same time, the film festival selections—which include classics like *Rebel Without A Cause*, *Barbarella*, and the original *Ocean’s 11*—intentionally appeal to a wide audience. Leff asked Chediak, now director of programming at the [Coral Gables Art Cinema](#), to select the 24 films for the festival. “If you’re not into fashion, you could still love the films,” Leff says. “But if you’re into fashion, it’s almost like a historical retrospective of history of fashion.”

The festival offers two screenings daily except on Sundays, when there is one matinee, and admission is free. The 1,000-square-foot screening room holds 50 people and has been averaging between 15 to 20 people a showing. “As the word gets out, more people are showing up,” Leff says, and calculates that the festival is on pace to attract about 1,000 people total.

The Fashion Project occupies a third-floor space in the mall that previously was used for storage. To make it suitable as an exhibition venue, a redesign gave the space a modern look with concrete floors and exposed ceiling and ducts. “It’s a space that can be transformed from one space to another, always around the theme of fashion,” Leff says. As it transitioned into a screening room, Leff worked with Tui Pranich, whose firm Tui Lifestyle specializes in design of luxury condominiums. Sleek white couches, soft seating in bold red and white-patterned fabric, and grey curtains set a sophisticated residential tone for the space.

“I wanted it to feel intimate, cozy, and comfortable so people would want to come back,” Leff says. “People come in, and it feels like home. It’s exactly the spirit that we wanted.”

The film festival was intended to serve as a breather between the debut exhibitions this spring and two exhibitions planned for the fall—all curated by the London-based independent curator Judith Clark. This fall, the exhibit “The Past,” will explore fashion from 1915 and 1965, followed by “The Anniversary,” which will celebrate the 50th anniversary of Bal Harbour Shops from its opening in 1965 to the present day. In addition, public programming will include a fashion book club, a drawing class, and fashion-related speakers such as Elizabeth Semmelhack, senior curator of the [Bata Shoe Museum](#). This winter, the Fashion Project will present another film festival, a concentrated version from January 28 to 31 curated by a pair from the fashion school at Central Saint Martins and the University of Chicago.

“We want to highlight the intersection of fashion not only in the retail space but in design, in performance, in film, and in the other art forms,” Leff says. “We’re building a bigger conversation.”