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ARE TRANSFORMING
FABRIC INTO STORIES OF
STRENGTH AND CULTURE

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the season's agenda

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visibility, voice and
global reach at LAFS

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vintages across 30
restaurants and bars

Threading BORDERS

By Jenny Starr Perez

A photograph of two women standing behind a counter in a room with wood-paneled walls. The woman on the left is wearing a black sleeveless dress and has her hair pulled back. The woman on the right is wearing a long, dark brown dress with a red and orange geometric pattern. Between them on the counter is a large vase of red flowers. In the background, there is a large mirror and a framed picture.

ESTEFANÍA LACAYO AND SAMANTHA TAMS CREATED A STAGE WHERE CULTURE AND COMMERCE MEET, EXPANDING GLOBAL ACCESS FOR EMERGING AND ESTABLISHED TALENT.

Photography is courtesy of Latin American Fashion Summit.

HEADLINERS

When Estefanía Lacayo and Samantha Tams launched the Latin American Fashion Summit in 2018, they weren't established event organizers. They were two women with conviction and an idea: Latin American designers belonged on the global stage.

"Our region has extraordinary creativity, but for too long it wasn't part of the global conversation," said Tams. "LAFS was born out of a desire to change that, to build a bridge between our designers and the world, and to prove that Latin America belongs on the international stage."

Seven years later, that bridge has become a superhighway. This November, LAFS returns to Miami with its most ambitious program yet bringing together leaders across design, retail, and technology. Themes will range from artificial intelligence and cross-border retail to sustainability and storytelling—subjects Tams calls "where fashion meets reality. Together, they reflect the future of fashion: innovative, responsible, and deeply connected to culture."

The founders often describe the early days as fueled by resilience and persistence. "Samantha and I had no prior experience in event organization, and I personally knew very little about Latin American fashion," recalled Lacayo. "What we did have was the conviction to create a platform that could unify all the incredible efforts happening across the region and put them on a global stage. In a way, our naiveness was an advantage—we weren't tied to old rules, so we did things our way."

That freedom became the DNA of the summit. "What started as a summit is now a movement," said Tams. "Today, LAFS is about fashion, but also about culture, identity, and building opportunities that reshape how the world sees Latin America."

Among LAFS's signature initiatives is Pitch to LAFS, a competition that has propelled small labels into global recognition. "Watching small, emerging brands evolve into international names is the most rewarding part of what we do," said Tams. "Our very first Pitch winner in 2018, Kika Vargas, went on to become the first Latin brand to design a collection for Target. Maygel Coronel, who started as a small label in Cartagena, has grown into a multi-million-dollar business. And Susana Vega, a Venezuelan designer who was so early in her journey that when Net-a-Porter placed an order right after the Pitch we had to help her find financing to produce it—today she runs a thriving business.

Mentorship, retail activations, and pop-ups further extend the reach. "Pitch to LAFS has been a game-changer, but what makes it powerful is that it doesn't stop there," said Tams. "Through mentorship, we equip designers with knowledge and guidance to thrive in the international arena. Our pop-ups give them a direct path to market and visibility with buyers and consumers. Even the podcast keeps the conversation alive all year long."

The summit's Miami base isn't incidental. "Miami is the natural hub for Latinos and Hispanics, but LAFS amplifies that role by giving it direction and purpose," said Tams. "What we've created is more than a summit, it's a platform where ideas, opportunities, and cultures meet. At LAFS, Latin designers meet global buyers, consumers, and media, and those encounters translate into real business and long-term impact. Miami becomes the stage where the world comes to discover Latin America."

For the two founders, building LAFS has also been a personal transformation. "The toughest part has been teaching entrepreneurs and young creatives that success takes investment—in yourself, in relationships, in knowledge," said Lacayo. "It doesn't happen from one summit; it's continuous work. But the most rewarding part is seeing the transformation in those who commit to the process—the 'before and after' makes it all worth it."

She adds that the experience has revealed her own resilience. "That I'm tougher than I thought," Lacayo said. "Resilience isn't something you're born with—it's something you build by refusing to quit when everything tells you to." As for the future, Lacayo is clear: "Five years from now, LAFS will be the reference point for Latin talent across fashion, beauty, and lifestyle—a year-round platform driving visibility, funding, and growth for our region."

Tams keeps her focus on the heart of the mission: representation. "It's deeply personal. This has been my purpose for the past eight years. Seeing designers break barriers and finally receive the recognition they deserve reminds me every day why we started."

Or as Lacayo puts it, "talent opens the door, but resilience keeps you in the room."

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