

**Newsweek**

## Fashion Designer Charged With Sexual Assault

Design sensation Anand Jon charged with felonious sexual assault.

WEB EXCLUSIVE

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March 15, 2007 - Fashion designer Anand Jon had been on a roll. The 33-year-old Indian-born designer turned out sexy \$300 hand-painted jeans decorated with South Asian motifs and delicately beaded gowns worn by glitterati like Ivanka Trump, Jessica Alba and Paris Hilton. In recent weeks, he'd been readying a new line of high-fashion items from jeans to exotic evening wear called Atomize for a March 20 runway show during L.A.'s Fashion Week. But the high-living designer was busy making himself into a brand, too. Jon appeared in several segments of the TV show "America's Next Top Model." And he was even hoping to star in his own reality project that he was shopping around Hollywood with another client—"Lost" star Michelle Rodriguez—based on his life as designer and bon vivant.

Those plans were upended this month, when Jon found himself in Los Angeles County Jail. The designer, profiled in NEWSWEEK's "Who's Next for 2007" list of people to watch just last December, was arrested on March 6 in Beverly Hills, Calif., and subsequently charged with a seven-count felony complaint for allegedly sexually assaulting three different women between 2004 and 2007—including a 15-year-old girl, authorities say. Charges include forcible rape, lewd acts upon a child and attempted forcible oral copulation. Jon, whose legal name is Anand Jon Alexander, is being held in lieu of a \$1.365 million bond. Jon's attorney, Ronald Richards, denies all charges and suggests that any sex that took place was consensual. "He denies any illegal sexual acts took place with any of these people," Richards told NEWSWEEK.

The investigation began on the afternoon of March 5 when a woman listed in the complaint as Jessie B. told Beverly Hills sex-crimes detectives that Jon had assaulted her the night before. The woman, who was visiting Jon from the Northwest, had met Jon through MySpace and the two had e-mailed back and forth for months, according to Richards, before Jon paid for her flight to Los Angeles. Police investigated, and arrested Jon at his North Palm Drive apartment at 8:30 on the evening of March 6 on suspicion of rape. They subsequently added sexual battery and attempted oral-copulation charges.

Detectives also scrambled to look into other allegations of possible misconduct. "Subsequent investigation revealed that there were at least three additional victims," says Lt. Mitch McCann, spokesman for the Beverly Hills Police Department. Only two of those alleged victims are included in the current charges.

The news saddened friends in the fashion industry. "He's a talented young man with a completely different take on fashion which is always refreshing," said a Los Angeles designer, who requested anonymity because he didn't want to be associated with the scandal. "But he was definitely living the fast life with the celebrities and all that. We all like to have the celebs wear our clothes, but many times we can become too friendly with them in an effort to live that life. And that can be dangerous."

Prosecutors say Jon committed lewd acts on the 15-year-old female model on March 3 and 4—just a day before he allegedly had forcible sex with Jessie B. And in October 2004, he allegedly raped a woman named Natalie P. who later complained to police in her home state. The case was investigated, but no charges were filed at that time, says McCann, the Beverly Hills officer. In another sexually related case early in the decade, Jon pleaded guilty to a reduced misdemeanor charge of disturbing the peace, says Richards, the attorney—which netted Jon a three-year probation.

Richards admits that Jon knew the three women but denies that any sexual contact was illegal. In the 2004 case, he says, the alleged victim had also met Jon online and had flown to L.A. at his suggestion. Months later, the woman complained to police in her home that she'd had forced sex with Jon, but the story was investigated and prosecutors declined to file charges. "This complaint was filed six months after [the alleged rape]. "That's sort of a problem" for her story, Richards says. The juvenile "lewd act" consisted of touching the 15-year-old's underwear, Richards says. "This wouldn't even be a crime if she was of age, and he certainly

didn't know that she was a child," he insists, adding that the model claimed "on tape to be 18."

Richards says the woman in the alleged March 5 rape flew to L.A. after Jon bought her a plane ticket so that the pair might hang out during Fashion Week. She arrived at his residence March 4, and agreed to spend the night there, according to Richards. Richards won't confirm that his client had sex with the woman. But if they did, Richards says, it must have been consensual because there were two other women in the apartment at the time. "If she was really being raped, why didn't she yell for help," he says. "The two other people were 10 feet away, and they didn't hear anything."

Richards blasted both of the alleged rape victims as ambitious would-be models who met Jon online and warned, "When you have people fly in who you meet over the Internet, you don't know what you are getting."

Jon's arraignment is scheduled for March 19 in Los Angeles. In the meantime, he's being held at a downtown L.A. jail where he spent the first five days sleeping on a bench in a lockup while awaiting a cell in a special housing unit. "He's sort of shocked," says Richards. "He's never been in jail before." Richards called the million-plus bail "ridiculous" and hopes to lower it in order to get Jon out of jail. (The bail was set according to a state formula for multiple rape charges.) But he still may not go free. The designer is in the United States on a visa, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has placed a hold on his visa. That means that even if he's released from jail, he could wind up in ICE custody. Meanwhile, fans of Jon's fashions will have to wait to see his latest offerings. His March 20 runway show has been cancelled.

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