

Maliha (L) wears: Skirt, Dhs970; headband Dhs260, both Mochi. Top, Dhs690, Friend of Mine at West L.A. Shoes, her own. Zeina (Middle) wears: Jacket Dhs1810, Mochi. Top; sunglasses; trousers; shoes, her own. Ayah (R) wears: Skirt Dhs1400, Mochi. Kimono Dhs1,535 Lisa Maree at West L.A. Top and shoes, her own.





# *The* STYLE

WHERE FASHION GETS PERSONAL

## FASHION'S NEW FIRST FAMILY

*Why Mochi designer Ayah  
Tabari chose her stylish  
siblings as her fashion muses*

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**F**rom Rodarte's Mulleavy sisters to Sienna and Savannah Miller, stylish siblings have been keeping fashion in the famiglia since Versace's reign, and Ayah Tabari, the 27-year-old Palestinian designer behind hip new label Mochi is no different. Her debut line – a dreamy blend of embroidered haute hippie textiles and sleek silhouettes – is directly inspired by the contrasting personalities of her two older sisters, Maliha, 31, and Zeina, 30.

When *Bazaar* met up with the effervescent trio for a photo shoot in their sprawling Emirates Hills family home, it was clear why Ayah elected her sparky siblings as her sartorial muses. The pieces infuse the free spirit of art gallery owner Maliha with the polished finesse of business leader Zeina, and the result is a chic collection that evokes a sun-dazed summer festival vibe. It's a look Ayah describes as "refined bohemian", and it's one that looks set to be a hit amongst the Glastonbury

“**T**he collection is inspired by the spectacular embroidery, beautiful culture and vibrant colours of India.”

AYAH TABARI

Ayah wears: Top & Skirt, Dhs860 for set, Mochi. All jewellery, her own.

Zeina wears: Vest  
Dhs890; clutch,  
Dhs650, both  
Mochi. Top; skirt  
and jewellery, her  
own.



## Z E I N A T A B A R I

30, BUSINESS LEADER

Zeina Tabari, Chief Operating Officer at construction firm Drake & Skull International (DSI) describes her style as “simple, polished and preppy,” and it’s her love of sleek silhouettes which has been translated into the Mochi collection. A powerful Arab woman in a male-dominated role, she keeps her modern and stylish look conservative for the board room. Despite these constraints, she is a fierce advocate of her little sister’s Mochi brand, and uses the bright pieces as accents in her otherwise neutral palette. Typically, she tempers an embroidered Mochi jacket with formal work pants and plain dresses in plain colours. Though they may clash in style and character, she is her sisters’ biggest supporter. “I support everything my sisters decide to start. We are a family that loves to create. I believe that our family’s background in the corporate industry gave us the discipline you need to be an entrepreneur.”

and Coachella summer style tribes, as the laid-back looks easily translate from day to night. “In the day, I would wear a pair of Mochi embroidered shorts with a monochrome tank top or tee, or a Mochi crop top with a pair of denim cut offs,” says Ayah. “For the night, a simple maxi dress dressed up with a Mochi blazer, or a Mochi skirt with a tailored shirt.”

Her take on ‘refined bohemian’ is a fusion of her sisters’ contrasting approaches to style. “I definitely feel that my sisters did influence me,” says Ayah. “I feel like my style is somewhat of a combination of the two of them. I get my bohemian, pared-down side from Maliha and my professional, refined side from Zeina.” She adds, “Maliha is completely unapologetic in her approach to fashion; she is daring and artsy. Zeina on the other hand is more ladylike, opting for more tailored and professional pieces. Me, I like to mix the two.”

The charm of the boho-chic Mochi collection comes largely from its organic origins. Ayah is fiercely passionate about ancient craftsmanship and embroidery, so much so that she scrapbooked the collection by travelling to the colourful bazaars in India – a country with which she has enjoyed a years-long love affair.

“I visited Goa in April 2011 and witnessed the most beautiful embroidery and colours I had ever seen,” she recalls. “I loved a lot of the pieces I saw at the markets and bazaars, however I felt they were a little too traditional, so I decided that I would re-contextualise the embroidery with up-to-date, trend-driven silhouettes.”

Every season Ayah plans to draw influence from a different region of the world, but one thing will remain constant: her dedication to the colourful celebration of the art of embroidery. Unsurprisingly then, her first collection is dedicated to India’s Rajasthan region, where her passion for embroidery was first awakened. “I decided to make Jaipur the focus of my first collection because of their spectacular embroidery, beautiful culture and their vibrant colours. I love India and since it is close to home it was the perfect destination.”

But it’s not just the ancient weaving traditions which left Ayah enamoured of the South East Asian country: she submerged herself in all aspects of the culture to produce the collection. “I think what really makes India so special to me is the spiritual aspect of the country. I love their temples – visiting the temples in Jaipur was very surreal and beautiful, and the connection I felt was very overwhelming.”

The reaction to the runway collection has been astounding, particularly among the young Arab style set who have been snapping up Ayah’s modern take on artisan textiles. Ayah believes it’s the brand’s individuality which sets Mochi apart in the Middle East, a market traditionally dominated by big brand labels. “When creating the line, I didn’t really take into consideration the lack of options for unique pieces, I just wanted to expose the beauty of different cultures to people. In hindsight, I feel the reason for the brand’s success is due to its uniqueness. Our customers love the fact that what they are buying is one of a kind.”

**M A L I H A T A B A R I**

31, GALLERY OWNER

As founder of Dubai's Art Space gallery, Maliha Tabari is no stranger to promoting creative talent in the Middle East, but when the talent in question is your little sister, the task has somewhat more gravitas. Luckily for Maliha, supporting Mochi has been effortless, given that it's her own carefree bohemian style that has heavily influenced the brand's creator. "I tend to gravitate towards statement pieces. I would describe my style as daring as I love to clash and mix prints." Unsurprisingly then, Maliha has slipped effortlessly into the role of Mochi ambassador. "I wear my Mochi pieces both in the day and night. I love pairing it with simple basics to highlight the statement factor of the embroidery. I wore my Mochi pieces several times in London and I was very happy to see how many people stopped me to ask about what I was wearing," says Maliha. "My favourites have to be the turban and jacket and the trapeze bag."



Maliha wears: Shorts, Dhs650; turban, Dhs300, bot Mochi. Top and Jewellery, her own.

Leading the new breed of Mochi ambassadors are, of course, Ayah's muses and confidantes, Maliha and Zeina. "My sisters have been very supportive, and they've bought heavily into the collection. They wear Mochi constantly at events and when they travel. What better brand ambassadors than your sisters?" she laughs.

Seeing the pieces styled by her chalk-and-cheese sisters has been especially fulfilling for Ayah. "It is such a joy to see how they wear them. I feel really happy; I love to see how they style it, as they have such different approaches to their personal style. It inspires me and gives me ideas – it also shows me how Mochi can really be worn by anyone!"

The sisters' differing style sensibilities also brings an added bonus: all three ladies wear the collection so differently that they never run the risk of showing up in the same outfit. So while they do borrow each other's clothes, Ayah says they will often have to pin or style pieces to suit their differing body shapes and contrasting tastes. Do they fight over clothes? "Only when one of us damages or loses another's piece!" giggles Ayah.

In-fighting aside, Ayah maintains that her sisters have been the driving force behind her brand. They have acted, not just as fashion muses and style ambassadors, but as business advisors. Zeina, Chief Operating Officer at Drake & Scull International (DSI), one of Dubai's fastest-growing companies, is a new fixture on the Most Powerful Arabs list, and has been key in devising the business objectives of Mochi. While Maliha, founder of Art Space gallery has been a constant source of artistic inspiration for the burgeoning fashion designer. You only have to

look at the amount of art permeating the walls of the family home to see that it is a place where self-expression and creativity are nurtured.

"I think most people forget how business-orientated the fashion industry is. I definitely got my business instinct from my sisters and family. But the fact our family is also involved in art is obviously a constant source of inspiration," says Ayah. "My sisters have given me good advice based on their own experiences. They advised me to take risks, and to be disciplined. But what I feel is most important is advising me to ensure I take body shape and different styles into consideration."

Now that the collection has come to fruition and the brand is taking off, Zeina and Maliha say they couldn't be prouder of their little sister. Though Maliha says watching Ayah enter the fashion world was almost inevitable, given the family's propensity for style. "Fashion is really a key tool of expressing ourselves in the family, so we were always interested in fashion. When Ayah went into the fashion scene it was a natural transition," says Maliha. "I love how she promoted Mochi by hosting trunk shows in Dubai, and the concept of creating a collection involving different tribes from around the world is brilliant."

And as far as advice for their younger sibling goes, both Zeina and Maliha stress the importance of brand with a capital 'B'. "Fads come and go, so creating brand value is the most important tool for success," says Zeina. While Maliha adds, "My advice from my own experience is to stay passionate and true to your brand." Listening to her talking about Mochi, we don't think Ayah will have a problem on either count.