

The **STYLE**

WHERE FASHION GETS PERSONAL

Yalda Golsharifi wears belted top, Dhs1,300; trousers, Dhs2,400, both by Bleach. Shoes and accessories, Yalda's own



KUWAIT'S NEW KOOL

*Bazaar meets the Kuwaiti
muses behind the edgiest
niche Arab labels*

*Words by AOIFE STUART-MADGE
Photography by MAHA ALSAKER*



From left: Noha Nasser Al Roumi wears dress, Dhs9,000, Reem Juan; accessories Noha's own. Nouf Hussein wears skirt, Dhs975, Mochi; top, Dhs1,300, Bleach; accessories Noaf's own. Xeina Almusallam wears top, Dhs7,000, Madiyah Al Sharqi; trousers and accessories, Xeina's own. Fajer Alawadhi wears dress, Dhs9,000, Reem Juan; accessories Fajer's own. Yalda Golsharifi wears dress, Dhs4,300, Dima Ayad; accessories, Yalda's own.

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here better to hold a showcase of emerging Middle Eastern designers than Kuwait City's Sadu House? Steeped in the history of local fabric weaving traditions, the indoor courtyard of this museum served as the perfect backdrop for an A/W13 preview of the Arab designers du jour.

The super glam two-day event was the brain child of Firras Alwahabi, founder of UAE-based fashion PR firm Faux Consultancy and Kuwaiti fashion leader and style consultant Noaf Hussein from Pretty Little Things, who hosted the event. It was a unique opportunity for Kuwait's most style-savvy women to shop S/S13 trends from eight up-and-coming regional designers and to get an exclusive look at the A/W13 collections. "The Kuwaiti ladies were very impressed with the caliber of the brands that took part. The details, the finishing, the international standards, and the covetability of the pieces," says host Noaf.

The gathering – aptly named 'Fashion Has Landed' – also provided the perfect platform for the Arab designers on show to meet a VIP circle of fashion-forward Kuwaiti shoppers, a client-base that is notorious for

embracing cutting edge, home-grown talent over big brands.

"Middle Eastern women are increasingly choosing to invest in more niche labels over big brands to be unique and to stand out without having to pay such a heavy premium for it," says Dima Ayad, 33, one of the designers showcasing at the event. This is particularly true of Kuwaiti women, says Dima. "Though a small country, Kuwait is a hub for fashion mavens and emerging talent," she says. "It's evident that women in Kuwait are all about seeking out emerging designers and local talent to support their individual and unique sense of style."

Displaying alongside Dima were local labels Bleach, Endamage, Madiyah Al Sharqi, Maryam Omaira, Mochi, Reem Juan and menswear designer Naz Cannon, with Bleach's mix-and-match abaya-inspired designs and Mochi's embroidered pieces proving particularly popular.

"It was amazing seeing Arabs support Arabs," says event organiser Firras, who stressed the importance of such exposure for smaller labels. "Kuwait has the strongest boutique society in the GCC, which makes the market very important to designers. Kuwaiti women are style leaders and once a designer has their support, they are very loyal."

For Badreya Faisal, the 30-year-old Dubai-based designer behind Bleach, it was a welcome opportunity to experience Kuwait's avant- ➤

X E I N A A L M U S A L L A M

25, KUWAITI

Fashion blogger Xeina Almusallam is an ambassador for street style and looks towards edgy, fashion-forward labels. "I'm more about self empowerment and androgyny," she says.

"I like my clothes to represent a strong, structured and clear image." For her *Bazaar* shoot, she chose a top from Madiyah Al Sharqi in fur, leather and suede. "I was drawn to the concept of mixing different elements: a bit of a hard edge with the soft," she says. Xeina is a fan of lesser-known urban brands. "It's liberating and creatively friendly," she says.



“**T**he pieces still have that Arabic feel but in a very modern way”

FAJER ALAWADHI

Fajer wears top, Dhs2000; skirt, Dhs5,500 both by Endamage. Shoes and accessories, Fajer's own

F A J E R A L A W A D H I

26, KUWAITI

Fajer Alawadhi, one half of label Bohemiah, gravitated towards contrasting looks by Reem Juan and Endamage for her *Bazaar* shoot. "Both looks were very different yet sophisticated. The elegance of the Reem Juan dress was in the tiny, beautiful detailing, whereas I loved the bohemian feel of the Endamage top and skirt. Both looks made me feel classically modern." Her own style, she says, is also an eclectic blend of classic and modern. "I take what works for me from the latest trends and mix it with something sophisticated and classic."

**N O H A N A S S E R
A L R O U M I**

KUWAITI

Fashion designer Noha Nasser Al Roumi loves clothes that make her feel special, so naturally seeks out one-of-a-kind pieces for her wardrobe. "Big brands are getting more commercialised, where each piece is mass produced, and an 'It' piece is worn over and over, whereas niche brands create limited or one-of-a-kind pieces that makes it extra special". For her *Bazaar* shoot, she chose a stunning Reem Juan dress. "I always get drawn to classical pieces with a modern twist, and intricate detailing with a flawless finish."

Noha Nasser Al Roumi wears dress, Dhs9,000, Reem Juan; accessories Noha's own



Noaf Hussein wears skirt, Dhs975, Mochi; top, Dhs1,300, Bleach; accessories Noaf's own



“**T**here is an immense pool of untapped designing talent in the Middle East - it's exciting!”

NOAF HUSSEIN

**N O A F
H U S S E I N**

27, KUWAITI

Noaf Hussein says hosting the Fashion Has Landed event was "absolutely thrilling" as she is committed to supporting local designing talent. "There is an immense pool of untapped talent in the Middle East," she says. "Emerging talent will never turn into celebrated talent without the support. And it's exciting!" Noaf opted for Mochi for her *Bazaar* shoot, saying "Mochi is everything I love in clothes - fun, vibrant, comfortable, wearable, and demure yet flirty." While she was also lusting after the silhouettes at Madiyah Alsharqi.

“**F**ashion-lovers in Kuwait are moving away from international brands towards more unique pieces”

YALDA GOLSHARIFI



YALDA
GOLSHARIFI

27, IRANIAN

As co-founder of clothing label Bohemiah, Yalda Golsharifi has witnessed the satisfying shift in Kuwait towards niche labels. “There was a movement before towards international brands; where fashion was not as personal,” says Yalda. “Now fashion-lovers are being lured to more unique pieces.” And they don’t come much more unique than Yalda, who describes herself as a “fashion gypsy” taking much of her inspiration from her travels. “I love mixing and matching unexpected pieces.” The end result she describes as “chic-hippy.”

Yalda Golsharifi wears dress, Dhs4,300, Dima Ayad; accessories, Yalda’s own

garde style scene first hand. “After having participated in the event, I have utterly fallen in love with the style of Kuwaiti woman. More than being on trend, they are elegant, so incredibly unique and experimental,” says Badreya, who herself is noted for her innovative style.

This emergence of Middle Eastern style is especially important to Badreya as her abaya-influenced concept is all about ‘bleaching’ the boundaries between convention, style and modern practicality. And it’s this ability to effortlessly blend tradition with contemporary style that makes Arab designers so appealing to Middle Eastern shoppers.

“Middle Eastern women are identifying their own style, in an attempt to be different from their Western counterparts. This new generation of stylish women are definitely evolving the regional industry,” says Lubna Al Zakwani, 26, the Omani designer behind Endamage. “The Kuwaiti market in particular is very experimental when it comes to style. They are open to new ideas and not afraid to stand out from the crowd.”

For Yalda Golsharifi, 27, and Fajer Alawadhi, 26, co-founders of the label Bohemiah, and guests at the event, the pieces on display at the trunk show felt incredibly personal to them as Kuwaiti fashion-lovers. “I loved all the pieces from the Endamage collection, and I love that I could feel the Middle Eastern touch in their designs,” says Fajer. “All the pieces blended culture and fashion perfectly together, where the pieces still have that Arabic feel but in a very modern way.”

Wearing a piece designed by a fellow Arab woman also brings a sense of familiarity that a big brand just can’t mimic, says Fajer. “You can feel the designers’ perspectives through their pieces, and can somewhat relate to them because you know that they are just like you,” she says. “The pieces are more personal, and talk to you.”

In an exclusive shoot for *Bazaar*, six of Kuwait’s most stylish women model their picks from the new breed of hot Arab designers. ■



Sarah Al Abdulkareem wears dress, Dhs17,500, Maryam Omaira

SARAH AL
ABDULKAREEM

27, KUWAITI

As co-owner of accessories label Ninas de Papa, Sarah Al Abdulkareem is no stranger to making a style statement, so it’s no surprise she gravitated towards a show-stopping gown for her *Bazaar* shoot. Wearing a stunning Maryam Omaira dress, Sarah says she loved the colour, cut and sheer factor, while she also admired a red dress by Madiyah Al Sharqi. “These new designers are young and they understand what the girls of our generation want to wear; they understand the Arabian woman, but are modern enough to appeal to all women.”