

The **STYLE**

WHERE FASHION GETS PERSONAL

Fatten Abbar wears top,
Dhs2,890. Preen, and skirt,
Dhs7,854. Carolina Herrera

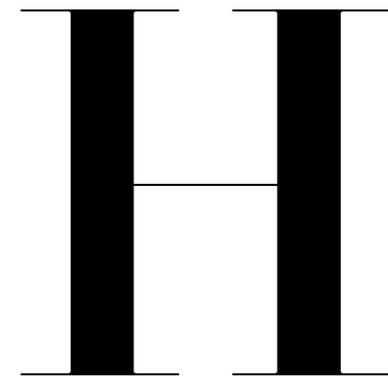
LA VIDA MODA

*Bazaar unlocks the door to
Saudi's new-gen style scene*

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From left: Sharifa Adham wears azur short sleeve structured dress, Dhs9,160, Marni; Rima Al Faour wears sunburst embroidered cocktail dress, Dhs14,180, Prabal Gurung; Arwa Hafiz wears silk faille puff sleeve sheath dress, Dhs9,750, Carolina Herrera; Fatten Abbar wears silk faille long evening skirt, Dhs9,750, Carolina Herrera and 'Wyatt' top, Dhs2,890, Preen; Dur Fayeze wears 'Regan' dress, Dhs6,370, Preen



How do you create the perfect fashion storm? By marrying the Middle East's most style-savvy women with the only online luxury fashion retailer to offer access to full runway

collections by the world's most coveted designers. So naturally, style sparks were flying when the team from online emporium Moda Operandi descended on Saudi Arabia recently for an exclusive trunk show attended by an elite guestlist of Riyadh's well-heeled fashion set.

Hosted by HRH Princess Reema bint Bandar Al Saud and Saudi's style leader Sara Bahamdan, the event – held at the opulent Bahamdan family home – showcased key pieces from Moda Operandi's online boutique, including designs by Marni, Hermès, Giambattista Valli, Carolina Herrera, Preen and Peter Pilotto. The 60 VIP invitees also got the unique opportunity to purchase garments immediately – a first for Moda Operandi, which was previously exclusively a pre-tailer.

The gathering marked Moda Operandi's third style excursion to the Middle East – the team has already visited Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Kuwait – and, says MO's co-founder Aslaug Magnusdottir, it's a perfect

fashion pairing: not only do Middle Eastern women have a particular penchant for online shopping, they also possess an insatiable demand for highly coveted, exclusive pieces. Something to which host Sara Bahamdan can attest: "Saudi women love individuality; they always like to know the latest trends and be the first to wear what's new each season," says Sara. "The social life amongst women in Saudi is very active, so dressing up and looking stylish becomes very competitive. Moda Operandi ensures she gets those one-off pieces before anyone else."

It's no surprise then that GCC women, and Saudi women in particular, have been clicking onto Moda Operandi in their droves for front-row access to exclusive next season buys. As such, the online outlet has recognised the region as a hub for fashion followers and discerning shoppers – an emerging market they are keen to tap into. "The Middle East is our second biggest market after the United States, with many of the customers in the region coming from Saudi Arabia," says Aslaug.

Inspired by her previous regional visits, and facilitated by Dubai-based PR firm The Qode, Aslaug instigated a meeting of fashion minds between her creative team – including her creative director and *Bazaar* style muse Taylor Tomasi Hill and her chief marketing officer Ashley Bryan – and 60 of Saudi's most fabulous and fashion-forward ladies. ►

“**T**he younger generation of Saudi women tends to be very bold and loud in what they wear”

ARWA HAFIZ

Arwa wears silk and white peplum dress by Giambattista Valli, Dhs10,290

ARWA HAFIZ

35, SAUDIA ARABIAN

Interior designer Arwa describes her personal style as classic and says she is drawn to elegant, timeless garments. For her, discovering Moda Operandi was like finding the missing piece of her style puzzle. “With the ever-changing styles and unique pieces there is always something to look forward to.” She believes Saudi women are often misunderstood in the fashion world. “Unlike the perception, Saudi women are very fashion aware. They are unique and conservative in their style, but the younger generation of Saudi girls tends to be very bold and loud in what they wear. I find that very refreshing – they are like the Japanese of the Middle East.” Arwa fell in love with both the silk faille puff sleeve sheath dress by Carolina Herrera and the Giambattista Valli red and white peplum dress that Taylor Tomasi Hill selected for her *Bazaar* shoot. “I love both dresses – they are perfect for a cocktail party.”

Faten wears bright pink peplum dress, Giambattista Valli, Dhs14,675

“I do not conform to any one style; I believe in and enjoy dressing for the occasion and my mood.”

FATEN ABBAR

F A T E N A B B A R

30, SAUDI ARABIAN

Research analyst and fashion consultant Faten Abbar's style influences span across decades and design eras. "I love so many different styles and looks, from 1950s glamour to today's city street style and rock chick looks," she says. "I do not conform to any one style; I believe in and enjoy dressing for the occasion and my mood. I also like to mix and match: I'll wear a classic Alaïa dress with a Balenciaga leather biker jacket and a pair of chunky high-heeled ankle boots.

Fashion-forward Faten loved both looks she wore for her shoot with *Bazaar*: "The pink peplum Giambattista Valli dress I would wear to a cocktail party or a semi-formal dinner; while the Carolina Herrera skirt and Preen top would be perfect for a dinner party in Saudi." She loves that Moda Operandi puts her front-row at the world's fashion capitals from the comfort of her Saudi home. "Saudi women are much more sophisticated shoppers than people realise; they know what they want and have a great eye for talent. Moda Operandi gives us real-time access to the same designers and pieces we are used to buying in London, Paris and New York."



DUR FAYEZ

31, SAUDI ARABIAN

As owner of funky accessories boutique Dadu, Dur FayeZ is no stranger to experimentation when it comes to fashion. She describes her own style as “eclectic, far from classic,” and relies on pre-ordering from Moda Operandi to secure key pieces to update her wardrobe each season.

She believes the online boutique is the perfect platform for trend-hungry Saudi women to view the new season’s runway trends ahead of time. “Saudi women are becoming more and more aware of fashion nowadays, and every stylish woman has created her own sense of individuality.”

When she travels, particularly to Europe or the States, Dur adapts her wardrobe according to the seasons – and loves the rare chance to wear A/W trends. “Travelling abroad gives me the opportunity to wear different outfits due to the change of climate. In Saudi, the weather is the same all year long.”

“Saudi Arabian women are becoming more and more aware of fashion nowadays”

DUR FAYEZ

Dur wears ‘Christina’ dress by Peter Pilotto, Dh\$17,318

And, of course, *Bazaar* was there to capture this unique fashion moment.

With the suitably glamorous backdrop of the indoor swimming pool at the Bahamdan family home’s recreation area, guests mingled among mannequins styled in exquisite garments from Moda Operandi’s online boutique, complemented by an impressive array of accessories, including an extensive fine jewellery collection – commanded by a lust-worthy selection of stunning vintage Chanel pieces.

True to form, the trend-seeking Saudi ladies indulged their love of cutting edge fashion by snapping up key pieces – in fact, two of the four vintage Hermès bags the Moda Operandi team had brought with them sold before the event had even begun!

With super-stylist Taylor Tomasi Hill – a self-confessed “style chameleon” – on hand to offer her expert fashion advice, the evening was a true sartorial spectacle, and a testimony to the insatiable passion for agenda-setting fashion shared by Saudi women.

“We are all Saudi women with our own style, yet we share a common love for fashion,” said 32-year-old Sharifa Adham, one of the invitees.

The Moda Operandi team – who host private viewings all over the world – was overwhelmed with the reception they received. “There was more shopping at this event than any other event we have hosted,” laughs Aslaug, who added that the attendees were enthralled with her straight-from-the-runway shopping concept.

“The women we met were generally very excited about the site. Most of them had shopped online and said that they loved the convenience of it. What they particularly loved about Moda Operandi was the ability to shop the special runway pieces. At the event, many of the ladies also brought their daughters and they were just as thrilled to learn about this new way of shopping.”

The soirée was a learning curve for Aslaug, too, who discovered Saudi women’s love affair with show-stopping gowns and their sense of style adventure. “Our clientele in this region tend to appreciate many of the special gowns, dresses, and other evening pieces that we offer from designers like Alberta Ferretti, Marchesa and Valentino, but they also have shown a strong amount of interest in our emerging designers.” ▶

“Shopping in Saudi can be limited, and women here love fashion, so Moda Operandi gives us access to designers we might not have here”

RIMA AL FAOUR



Rima wears lace blue X dress (left), Dh\$10,698, Peter Pilotto, and embroidered cocktail dress, Dh\$14,185, Prabal Gurung



RIMA AL FAOUR

29, SAUDI ARABIAN / AMERICAN

Party planner Rima Al Faour keeps her look simple, and feminine. “Less is more. I like an effortless, laid-back look,” says Rima. “I love layers, but don’t like overly fussy hair and make-up.”

When at home in Saudi, she tends to dress more casually, as her lifestyle is “very homey”, so she relished the opportunity to dress up for *Bazaar’s* shoot. “I thought both outfits were great dinner party looks, but I loved the fun, bold coloured pattern of the Peter Pilotto dress.”

Rima believes Moda Operandi offers women in the region more fashion choice and flexibility. “Shopping in Saudi can be limited, and women here love fashion, so Moda Operandi really gives us access to designers and pieces we may not have here. And, it feels special to know you are ordering right off the runway, and are therefore more likely to have unique pieces that no one else has.”

**S H A R I F A
A D H A M**
32, SAUDI ARABIAN

“A girl should be two things: classy and fabulous,” so decreed Coco Chanel, and it’s a style statement that rings true for Sharifa Adham, an accessories buyer at Harvey Nichols in Riyadh. “I am pretty set in my ways. I love a sexy pointed toe and a skinny pant with something fabulous on top, whether it’s a leather one-of-a-kind studded jacket or a vintage fur vest. I think my style is about finding wearable and fun yet classic combinations,” says Sharifa. “Each and every Saudi woman’s style varies according to her own personality and individuality.”

This short sleeve structured Marni dress was a break from the fashion norm for Sharifa: “I would not have chosen it myself, but I felt great in it. It would be perfect for a day event in Saudi.”



“**E**ach and every Saudi woman’s style varies according to her own personality and individuality”

SHARIFA ADHAM

For Aslaug, the trip was also an opportunity for her to learn more about the style sensibilities of Middle Eastern women and to connect on a personal level with her clients in this region. “We love hosting events for our customers so that we can make a personal connection with them. I am passionate about learning about their lives, understanding which designers and products they like, and how we can better serve them.”

To that end, the Saudi hosts organised an event-packed activity for the Moda Operandi team to offer them a glimpse into Riyadh’s unique culture. Shopping was of course top of the agenda, with a visit to a traditional souq, while the ladies also experienced time-honoured Saudi pastimes with a desert safari – taking in a camel ride, a falconry lesson and a traditional Arabic meal in a Bedouin tent.

“One of the major highlights was our trip to the desert. That was an extraordinary trip that our wonderful hosts

had organised for us,” says Aslaug.

She adds, “The trip was one of the most unique and interesting travel experiences I have had in a long time. From meeting our amazing hosts and other women at the Moda Operandi event, to shopping for antiques and beautiful scarves in the local souq, to exploring the desert, the three-day trip was filled with fun-packed activities and passed by way too fast. I truly hope to make it back to Saudi Arabia soon and get better acquainted with the people and the culture.”

And it seems the feeling of adoration was mutual for Aslaug’s Saudi hosts, who fell in love with the exclusive looks the Moda Operandi team brought to our shores. In an exclusive shoot for *Bazaar*, styled by Taylor Tomasi Hill and featuring key pieces selected from the Moda Operandi boutique, five of Saudi’s most fashionable women share their sartorial secrets and reveal what makes Middle Eastern women so uniquely stylish... ■

Sharifa wears azur short sleeve structured dress, Dhs9,161, Marni

**FASHION
DIRECTOR’S
PICKS**

Sally Matthews edits her favourite S/S13 buys from Moda Operandi



Sunglasses, Dhs1,225, Nina Ricci



Jacket, Dhs3,551, Carven



Cuff, Dhs5,514, Aurelie Bidermann



Dress, Dhs18,092, Valentino



Shoes, Dh4,878, Prabal Gurung x Nicholas Kirkwood