

Bling on the Abaya

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Whoever said black is boring? From simply being a black robe, today the abaya has transformed itself into a fashion statement of its own, embellished with crystals and other decorative items. Here we speak to local designer, Nadia Al Midfa...

to find out the latest trends for the festive season

AS WE make our way through the 21st century, the abaya-clad woman remains as mystical and alluring as ever. The world around may have changed. Today Arab women are in the forefront of change. They have become key contributors to the economy and done it all while keeping their abayas on (maybe putting on better abayas on the way).

The abaya has evolved as has the woman who wears it. From being a black robe, today it has become a fashion statement; from a mark of identity it is now entering the realm of haute couture –celebrating the success of Arab women.



On the eve of Eid, City Times caught up with designer and founder of N Collection, Nadia Al Midfa, on putting your best foot forward in black this festive season.

The abaya has become a lot more glamorous now and can make a fashion statement all on its own. How do you think that reflects on the evolving Arab femininity?

Today Arab women are working in a changing environment and constantly interacting with people of different cultures. A significant amount of their time is spent outside the home; in the office, at the mall, restaurant or cafe. So the occasions are very rare when the clothes worn inside an abaya can be shown to female colleagues or friends and that has moved the focus on the abaya itself. A lot of details have been added to the abaya and shaila in the last 20 years.

Different forms of embroidery, cut-work, crystals and many other mediums are being experimented with when beautifying abayas today. There are fashion shows dedicated only to abayas and a foray of designers are investing quality time and money in abayas. That in itself speaks volumes on how developed the market is for this product. Women may have lesser time at hand but grooming is a priority and Arab women are still dressing their best.

Crystals, Swarovskis and all that bling — is the Arab attire being taken over by glitter?

There is room for a palette of varying tastes, so one particular design can't take over. The ladies are too spoilt for choice to remain loyal forever to glittering crystals and all that bling. However, the world is obsessed with Hollywood and the 'bling fashion sense' that Beyonce and Paris Hilton are projecting. Not only Arab women but most women are bedazzled with all the bling. So let's embrace and enjoy it while it lasts!



Arab fashion sensibilities are tinged by influences from Persia, India and Central Asia. Do you see any traditional forms of embroidery being revived?

Certainly. I have extensively used the antique Mogul embroidery that was originally very common in the courts of the maharajas in India. Something that is embedded in tradition is always in vogue because it is rare and at times expensive. It transcends time and is therefore a classic.

Getting an abaya designed by appointment may be rare. But are clients happy at having exclusive abayas or disappointed at not having designs available in larger quantities?

The ladies are happy that they are not paying for a uniform; having an outfit customised to your taste is not only exclusive, it's also personal. And it is western clothing that has tendencies of getting homogenous; abayas are definitely not showing those trends.

The abaya as a costume exudes femininity and needs to be carried with grace; as life paces in the fast lane will the abaya be left behind as an inconvenience?

I doubt that. As UAE modernises and women progress, they also remain cultured. And the younger generation is not complaining about it —they are comfortable in the abaya.

Bling is in



IT IS hard enough to please a woman's heart and an outfit by itself may not be enough. Once you have perfected your attire it is time to accessorise it with that perfect mobile, pen or anything that makes you tick. And the mantra these days is; if it goes bling, it is in!

Style guru Nadia Al Midfa has a few accessories that can make you part of the glitterati. Crystallised accessories; mobile phones, pens, laptops —you name it and it can be put down in crystal. City Times does a style check on these sparkling toys for the bigger girls and boys this festive season.

Crystallised Accessories – is it an idea that is workable for Paris Hilton fans only or is it something that everyone is taken in by?

Well crystals are very starry, very Hollywood but they are also very much in vogue. It is becoming fashion savvy to carry a loud and flamboyant persona so the inhibition to hold a flashy phone or a glittering accessory is out. We enjoy the attention and now we are getting bold in accepting that attitude. Luxuries are no longer limited to the stars and everyday folk want to savor a splurge. Plus we at N collections tailor the accessory to a client's taste and budget so the service is accessible to all.

Are these accessories more of a girl thing or is the metro-sexual man being roped in as well?

I have noticed that girls do like to personalise their accessories; add an individual touch but it is also a fact that men are getting more groomed by the day. They are using make up, they are wearing pink and if they like a little bling it is not over the top. Crystallised accessories at N Collection are customised; they are unique and luxurious pieces and there is no reason why men can't enjoy them. Of course the men go for different colour combinations; they might use more sports oriented logos on their phone or laptop. I have had a few boys who are ordering for themselves or to gift their friends for Eid. It is a new style statement and everyone wants to be seen with a crystallised accessory.



How is it as a designer to work on crystals?

I did a course where I studied crystals and the making of such accessories. We can crystallise on any material. Our crystals are shipped from abroad and N Collection provides a year's guarantee for our pieces — it is a perfect product.

The N Collection boutique is located at the Qanat Al Qasba and more information is available at www.ncollection.ae