

GIRL MEETS WORLD

Fresh from her win at the Arab Woman Awards in Doha, one of Qatar's hottest rising talents, Wadha Al Hajri shares a sneak peek at her spring/summer 2015 collection

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The SS15 collection takes inspiration from the Arabian oryx



Above: Qatari designer Wadha is on the road to fashion stardom

IT HASN'T EVEN BEEN FIVE YEARS SINCE WADHA AL HAJRI LAUNCHED HER EPONYMOUS COLLECTION

and already the designer's name is being whispered from the lacquered lips of some of fashion's most influential globetrotters. Her latest fan? Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned. When the royal style icon addressed dignitaries – including the eternally chic First Lady of the United States Michelle Obama – at the Global Education First Initiative in New York, she chose a crisp white eyelet skirt from Wadha's spring collection. "I was ecstatic to see that Her Highness had chosen to wear one of my designs for a great cause," the Doha-based designer tells *Grazia*. "I like to see my designs being worn by strong, influential, and power-driven women." And they seem to like her, too – Her Highness' daughter Sheikha Al

Mayassa was also recently spotted in a custom abaya crafted by Wadha. This isn't the first time the homegrown talent has been thrust onto the world stage. She was handpicked by *Vogue Italia* Editor-in-Chief Franca Sozzani to take part in the *Vogue Fashion Dubai* experience last year (which Wadha tell us was one of her favorite fashion experiences thus far) and she recently showcased her collection in a specially curated project at art legends Jeff and Justine Koon's New York gallery. Now the Qatar University graduate, who holds a degree in Foreign Affairs, is getting the recognition she deserves from her native land. At the Arab Woman Awards, which took place in Doha this fall at West Bay's InterContinental Hotel, Wadha took home the prestigious Young Designer award. "It meant a lot to me to be appreciated by my own community,"

she tells us. This heartfelt appreciation for her heritage can be seen in the designer's spring/summer 2015 collection, which is inspired by the Arabian oryx. "For me, the Arabian oryx symbolizes beauty, identity and originality, and this is exactly what I want to present [in] my collection." And what a collection it is! Crafted from silk crepe, organza and hand embroidery – all sourced exclusively from Italy and France – images of the majestic creature are mixed seamlessly with architectural-inspired geometric elements throughout her luxurious 20-look collection. "Art and architecture have always been a passion of mine and I keep these two things in mind when I try to find new ways to structure my designs," says Wadha, who credits her exotic upbringing – which, thanks to her parent's careers included stints in Damascus, Cairo, Amman and Doha – with fueling her creative fire. "Being brought up in [these] cities truly made me the person I am today. In each of these cities I was able to learn more about Arab civilizations and translate that through my designs. Each of the cities had their own charm and ambiance." Her global outlook also played a part in her lookbook shoot, which took place in London this October. Shot by celebrated Italian fashion photographer Francesco Bertola – whose client list reads like a Milan Fashion Week schedule – think Prada, Ferragamo and Kiton – the collaboration marks the second time Wadha has worked with the shutterbug. "Francesco is extremely talented and he understands both my vision and what I look for." In between jet setting to London and devoting countless hours to her designs,

Wadha, who cites Cristóbal Balenciaga's timeless designs and impeccable silhouettes as inspiration, also has a day job. "I am still a research assistant specializing in Arab politics as well as a designer. Politics and fashion are deep passions of mine, and I want to pursue them both. In order to manage my jobs, I prioritize and try to organize my time." Time that also includes bonding with her young daughter and family. "My family has without a doubt been the biggest influence on me." It's thanks to her family's unwavering support that after almost half a decade juggling both careers, Wadha has no plans of slowing down in either field. "Although five years does seem like a long time, it is just the beginning," says Wadha. "I feel happy to be doing something that I truly love." Like her growing fan base, we couldn't agree more. **h**

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