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RITA ORA'S SECRET NEW LOVE

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Ranya Khalil and Sara Alemzadeh

We meet the stylish duo behind the UAE's most exciting new fashion concept, *designer-24.com*



Always dreamt about wearing a dramatic Marchesa tulle gown? Or does Issa's slinky tangerine maxi take your fancy? Or perhaps you've been lusting after one of Greta Constantine's jewel-toned cocktail frocks...

Well, these dream dresses could be yours and for a fraction of the retail price.

But there's one catch, just like Cinderella's fairytale ball gown, you'll have to hand it back post-party.

The brand new rent-a-dress concept designer-24.com launched just a few weeks ago, and is already transforming the wardrobes of the UAE's style set.

We sit down with the two women behind the sparkling idea to talk parties, dresses and the designers to wear now.

You're both new to town. How has the experience been moving here?

R: I love it! I've found most people to be friendly and welcoming. At the beginning we were out all the time in the evenings, then I think people got bored of the newbies (laughs).

S: I'm Iranian but lived in New York for a long time. Coming to Dubai was very exciting. I love getting to know different cities around the world especially one where Farsi is spoken so often around me – it makes me feel right at home.

What prompted you to set up camp and start a business in Dubai?

S: When Ranya and I decided on this concept for the region, we thought Dubai was the ideal place to set up. We wanted to be based in the city that has been at the forefront of fashion and e-commerce in the Middle East – we also love the fast-paced energy of Dubai.

R: If we were going to be moving from London and New York, we had to make sure it was an equally cosmopolitan city.

How does the fashion scene differ here compared to New York and London?

R: Dubai is definitely a lot more glamorous. Growing up in London the look is a lot more understated and people wear a lot less colour.

What are other differences you've seen in style and how women dress in the UAE?

S: What's really special about this region is the fact that both sides end up learning from each other. The western expats who may be used to playing it a bit safer come here and start wearing a lot more colour, embellishments and start taking more fashion risks.

R: Whereas the local women then take inspiration from the west's appreciation for contemporary style.

What is the ethos behind designer-24.com?

S: The idea was to provide women with a collective wardrobe of designer dresses every season.

R: We figured there was no better place to do this than the UAE since everyone always looks so glamorous and are never short of events.

What type of woman do you see borrowing the dresses?

S: We are really happy for all kinds of women to be using our service. We never had a target group in mind. Really what we love most about this concept is that we are opening up luxury fashion to a wide array of women and educating them about all these amazing designers. And it's a good deal!

Are the piece you pick a reflection of your personal tastes at all?

R: We make sure to always carry pieces that represent the overall luxury aesthetic of designer-24. However, we do pick a wide variety of styles from contemporary to classics to make sure we have everyone covered as well as ourselves

Are there any style of dresses you avoid?

S: We try to avoid heavily beaded or embellished dresses as well as leather. We also avoid heavier fabrics simply because the climate in this region is much warmer.

Who are the most popular designers at the moment?

R: At the moment the two most popular designers have been Marchesa and Greta Constantine. With Marchesa, from the beginning we knew we had to have them. Their dresses are the epitome of fantasy luxury and suit the Middle Eastern women so well.

S: With Greta Constantine, we are very proud that a relatively unknown label from Canada has been so popular. We chose Greta because we really believed in them. Their dresses fit the female form so beautifully as well as being classy and cool at the same time. We are so excited that our customers are already developing loyalty to a new brand they did not know about!

What are the price points for renting a dress for the evening?

R: Approximately US$100-US$1,000/Dhs400-Dhs4,000. The price is 15 per cent of the retail price for four days' rental and 22 per cent of retail price for eight days.

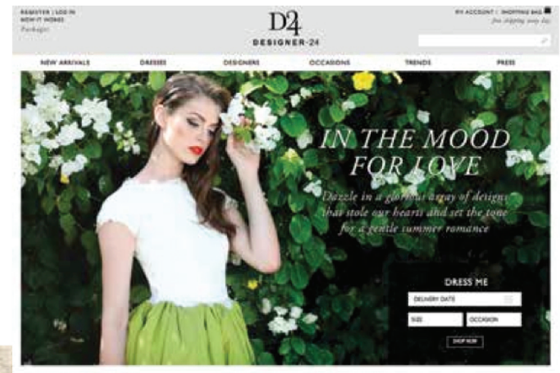
What if a customer damages a dress?

S: We want customers to feel comfortable wearing our dresses. We charge a small mandatory insurance fee, which covers most minor damages.

What are your plans for expanding your business in the future?

R: Accessories and clutches are definitely something we are looking to add down to the road. We would like to make the whole dressing process easier for women.

INTERVIEW: ANNAH CUTHBERT
PHOTOGRAPHER: FAROOQ SALIK





Sara (left) and Ranya (right) discuss their fashionable new concept