

Pink it Up

Interview by Lara Dunston

Pictures by Terry Carter

Beneath the glitzy designer brands and handicraft fodder lies a raging Dubai fashion scene, of which 25-year-old Raghda Bukhash of Pink Sushi is the star.

Using traditional Arabian elements such as the *ghutra* (the red-and-white-checked headdress), Japanese *harajuku*-inspired street fashion and Western pop culture kitsch, Raghda has created a unique Emirati style that can be seen under the *abayas* (black cloaks) of many young Emirati women.

The pink Energizer Bunny was Raghda's main source of inspiration (because it keeps going and going and going...), so once she had her Fine Arts degree in the bag, Raghda set about establishing a freelance graphic design business, followed by her fashion label **Pink Sushi** (*pink-sushi.com*). Aiming to twist the norms of national dress and contemporary fashion, Raghda says she caters to the more adventurous Emiratis she believes are out there - those who have a hunger for eccentric, avant-garde and one-off designs. And if sales of her creations are anything to go by - they're snapped up the moment she delivers them to her retailers - then adventurous Emiratis are out there alright.

What makes her designs so appealing to independent travellers to Dubai looking for a more original souvenir than a carpet or stuffed camel is the Arabian *ghutra* fabric that playfully dominates her creations. Be it in an asymmetrical skirt, or woven into a fabric rose pinned to a tight t-shirt, or crafted into a fun clutch purse, the *ghutra* fabric has become Raghda's signature.

Lara: What first motivated you to design your own range?

Raghda: I've always had a tendency to customise everything I own. My target is to dress humans up in bright rainbows! I seek inspiration from young international designers that have a kick for eccentric, experimental and quirky, fun fashion. My design sense seems to be born within me, thanks to some supernatural force. To me it's all about flashy colours and fusion. Pink Sushi designs are derived from merging Arabian heritage with 80s kitsch and *harajuku*, by taking the ordinary out of its cocoon and placing it in a new habitat to create a 'Bang'. I started off designing handbags utilising the *ghutra*, and I then

"I believe that fashion intertwines and reflects all social aspects of a society..."



A selection of Pink Sushi accessories designed by Raghda Bukhash.

diversified my creations, designing one-off embellished funky *ghutra* tops, skirts, printed t-shirt illustrations, and accessories such as badges, iPod covers and belts. My label reflects my ideology.

L: What are your main influences and sources of inspiration?

R: Inspiration is all around me. Dubai's energy deeply inspires me and so do numerous other random elements such as the colourful Dubai *souks*, Arabic typography and the magical Arabic calligraphic letterforms, my grandfather's wind-tower house, Hello Kitty, the vintage Souk Al Arsa in Sharjah, *harajuku*, Tokyo, independent world designers, Arabic candy wrappers, my lomography photoshops and polaroid transfers, tasty bite-sized sushi rolls, grocery stores, my high school sticker books, London's Camden Market, the Old Dubai fruit/vegetable market and vintage flea markets...

L: Wow! Are you attempting to make some kind of social or cultural statement with your work?

R: Emirati women have a rich history in the field of art.

Furthermore, in the UAE, most Fine Arts majors are dominated by women. Ideally the main cause of this deep affinity with the arts is their passion for experimentation with mixed mediums and their ability to nurture and express their existing talents, whether it's their beautifully embroidered, hand-woven *tally jalabiyas*, or paintings or

L: What are the next steps?

R: My brand is a work in progress. Every other day a new idea crawls up into my head and triggers all these buttons. My latest vision is to create experimental jewellery designs. I've already stepped forward to create a Pink Sushi Junior range this summer, a Pink Sushi For Him



printed fabrics. Personally, I try to draw from the essence and power of Emirati women in my designs and products. I believe that fashion intertwines and reflects all social aspects of a society. In my case, I'd love to capture the spirit and energy of my buzzing city in my creations, and in turn translate my corner of the globe to the rest of world. I also strive to break the stereotypes of Emirati woman being all about the fluff and in turn aim the spotlight at our artistic talents.

L: Was it hard to get started as a designer?

R: Ironically, I haven't faced any obstacles setting up my business to date. Over the years I have built a fantastic clientele that have termed my label "quirky", "playful", "young", "energetic", "Emirati-to-the-core", and "a definite show-stopper"! Yet I also consider myself very lucky to be gifted with very supportive family members and friends who constantly encourage me. My mother is the secret behind my passion for fashion; she's definitely the source of my starvation for colourful, eccentric designs and my love for customising and handcrafting things.

range and Pink Sushi Accessories. I have huge dreams for my brand on the international fashion scene. I'll set up an online Pink Sushi store by the end of this year, followed by my own Pink Sushi store, which I hope will reach out to the world someday.

L: How do you see the Emirati fashion scene developing?

R: The Emirati fashion scene is definitely mushrooming at present and it makes me proud to see Emiratis themselves rising with their own fashion labels. But in the UAE fashion field, young designers are in desperate need of dedicated spaces where we can easily showcase and sell our creations. It would be fun to witness a flea market-style fashion and art dedicated space, where young creative people could simply hang out over weekends and showcase and sell their art. 🌍

For more information on fashion and shopping in Dubai, see Lonely Planet's Best of Dubai & the Dubai City Guide, authored by Lara Dunston & Terry Carter.