

BAZAAR

AT WORK

A MIDAS TOUCH

Just months into her exciting new role as the first female CEO of Damas Jewellery, Asil Attar is already shaking things up by adding her unique touch of sparkle to the established luxury brand

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“**Y**ou should have seen this place before I arrived,” laughs Asil Attar as she whisks me from a spacious reception through to a cosy lounge area where she encourages me to sit down on a pristine pastel purple sofa with spindly gold legs.

I am at the Damas Jewellery headquarters in JLT to meet the luxury brand's new — and first ever female — CEO, where the lady in question, herself has only been for three months. But even in such a short space of time Asil's magic, feminine touch can already be seen throughout the two-storey building, which has been elevated into a chic, bright and contemporary space. It would be a pleasure to work here.

“Let me find you some ‘before’ pictures, you wouldn't believe it. It was so dark and dingy,” she announces, keen to proudly show off how far she has come since she took her seat in her, equally-as-pleasing to the eye, corner office.

A complete overhaul of the HQ aesthetic was one of the first things Asil ticked off her ambitious to do list. It looks impressive — with décor and accents in keeping with the brand's new colour scheme of neon mint, lilac coolness, and gold. “Of course gold,” the glamorous CEO exclaims. “I mean gold is what we stand for, it's our heritage having ▶



Sitting in the foyer of the newly revamped Damas head office, Asil Attar is the first female CEO of the established jewellery brand

been goldsmiths since 1907.”

And it's no surprise that the transformation has been so radical, not to mention well-executed. The mother-of-two whose career has spanned over 25 years in the luxury fashion sector, has a background in interior design having launched her own consultancy business in her early 20s, offering her services, and keen eye for detail, to London's slew of upmarket boutique hotels.

In fact, Asil achieved a number of things at a very young age, and reached goals years ahead of her peers, something she says is down to her single-minded ambition.

“My journey has been an evolution of passion and ambition and very much strategic. I am very impatient, I graduated high school when I was just 15 years old because in the US, you can build up accreditation in order to be able to graduate sooner. So I worked really hard over the summer in order to be able to start university at 15, making me by far the youngest in my year,” Asil explains.

But it didn't stop there for the child prodigy.

“I got really impatient and couldn't face completing a bachelors degree over four years, so instead, I worked really hard and did it in two.”

So there she was at the tender age of 18 with a BA in interior design and a whole load of ambition — the world was her oyster.

“I started up my interiors consultancy in London, aged 23, and my clients included some of the UK's leading boutique hotels such as Hempel, Armani Casa and The Sanderson. It was during the '90s when everything was focused on lifestyle and creating experiences, in essence a merge between fashion and interiors.”

Through industry word-of-mouth Asil learned that Harrods was looking to recraft its jewellery and accessories department, and was searching for buyers to facilitate the changes. Quickly realising that if she was going to pursue a career in the fashion sector — her passion since she was 15 years old and started to collect vintage pieces from fairs and stores around the world — then there was no better place to start than the UK's most famous department store.

“So I joined Harrods as a buying manager across fashion accessories and jewellery, and it was without doubt the defining moment in my career,” gushes Asil.

“I was so lucky to have worked directly with Mohamed Al-Fayed during a time when Harrods was morphing into this museum and all of these wonderful things were happening to this heritage department store.”

Asil continued to accrue invaluable experience and insight into all the different facets of the industry she was so passionate about — Harrods



In support of emerging designers, Asil displays a necklace on a mannequin wearing a dress that is a collaboration between Si Fashion Galerie and Aiisha Ramadan

WORDS OF WISDOM

1. Arm yourself with knowledge, it is empowering and drives confidence.
2. Be self-aware, it is humbling.
3. Base all your decisions on your values and ethics, that way you know you are always doing the right thing.
4. Know that you will constantly be learning, that way you accept your faults.
5. Earn your place through merit and performance.

taught her the best industry standards; from Karen Millen she learned how to create and build a brand and about the manufacturing processes; from a multi-million dollar start-up, funded by big name investors such as film producer, Matt Groening, and former Bloomingdale's CEO and President, Marvin Traub, Asil got to be the creative director of a project that she affectionately refers to as being: “just like the *X Factor* of the fashion industry.”

But her Iraqi heritage meant her affinity to the Middle East was never far from her mind and in 2001, after a little persuasion from her executive life coach husband, Asil accepted a job with Al Tayer in Dubai.

“I joined Al Tayer to help them restructure their organisation and to build the luxury segment of the group. Then I got another call a couple of years later from Majid Al Futtaim saying they weren't in a great place with their fashion sector and were looking to re-strategise and turn around a broken business, as well as position the group at the forefront of fashion in the region,” Asil explains.

So she did just that. But after 20 years in corporate environments Asil decided she wanted some time out, so embarked on two business ventures, one of which she named, Salt.

“Salt was set up to support local talent. I scouted some of the best designers in the region, like Aiisha Ramadan, and taught them how to structure a business and how to build a brand. My passion is about sharing and giving back, especially to the region where I'm from, and this was my way of doing it,” Asil reveals.

But she couldn't keep a low profile for long and soon one-hundred-year-old business, Damas was knocking on her door.

“I couldn't say no to the opportunity of coming in and revamping, revitalising and reclaiming one of the most iconic brands from the region,” explains Asil.

When asked how it feels to be the first female CEO of Damas, Asil says she is humbled, feels a tremendous sense of humility (a quality she takes from her father) and is, justifiably, proud of her achievements.

“It is time for Damas to remind people of our position as number one and to reclaim that top spot,” Asil declares passionately.

Having met this ferociously determined, ambitious woman there is no doubt that she will do exactly that — after all, it's apparent that everything she touches turns to gold. ■

OFFICE ESSENTIALS
Asil's day isn't complete without...



Turban and scarf, both Quirky Plains



Lava at Ounass candle, Dhs450



Montale Roses Musk at Selfridges perfume, Dhs398



Potted orchids



San Pellegrino sparkling water

PRICES APPROXIMATE



Wearing pieces by Iraqi jewellery designer, Eyad Blaybil, Asil has been at the helm of Damas since February 2019