

about



ATTAR WEARS  
VINTAGE AND  
BESPOKE  
ACCESSORIES

The first female CEO of Damas Jewellery in more than 100 years, Asil Attar talks writing a new chapter at the Middle East's legendary jewelry house

Words CATERINA MINTHE Photography ANKITA CHANDRA

# FACE

asil Attar is animatedly discussing Damas Jewellery – the Middle East's thriving international jewelry and watch retailer – upcoming news. “We are launching two new lifestyle and jewelry concept stores; a fabulous flagship with exclusive designers; and 28 renovated stores with an entirely new product mix and exclusive collections,” she says. That’s not all. There’s also a pan-Arab marketing campaign driving its new strategy and vision and

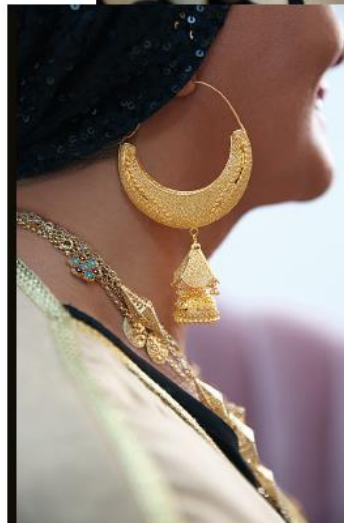
an omni-channel platform sharing the Damas universe with its customer – all with one key focus: women.

When Attar’s appointment to Damas took effect in March, she hit the ground running. “I wanted to deliver a number of messages to the region,” she affirms. “The first being that a female had taken the seat in leading the business. Second, that I was going to bring positive disruption to our new branding via store environments, products, and colors. Third, that women are the focus.” In an industry where brands emphasize product as their hero, at Damas, women are now front and center. Attar swiftly launched the company’s first-ever female campaign, titled *Feel Precious*. The muse is depicted covered in 24ct gold, representing Damas’s goldsmith heritage. “She is the precious one and our products are there to complement and empower her,” remarks Attar. It captured the attention of customers old and new. “Everyone knew that great change was coming.”



**RIGHT** ASIL ATTAR WEARING A TURQUOISE RING AND A QUARTZ DOME AQUAMARINE STONE FROM BARCELONA, WITH A BESPOKE HELIOPOLIS BAG

**BELOW** DAMAS BRACELETS AND PENDANT FROM THE UAE EXCLUSIVE COLLECTION BY IRAQI JEWELER AND ARTIST EYAD BLAYBIL **BELOW LEFT** GOLD HOOP EARRINGS INSPIRED BY GALCUTTA JEWELRY DESIGNS



The new CEO swiftly proceeded to “break down the barriers.” She shares, “I tore our main buildings apart and completely renovated and redesigned our head office. The teams were all sitting in separate buildings – dark, dingy, small rooms, not enough light, completely unmotivating and uninspiring, I hated it.” Today, the venue resembles a New York loft with bright, open areas and colorful interiors. “Freedom of thought, space, and expression... the most important thing is to ensure that the environment in which everyone is working is amazing,” she comments. The culture shifted to one of empowerment, entrepreneurship, diversity, and inclusion. “Productivity has sky rocketed,” she asserts. Attar herself is a workaholic. “I haven’t had a proper vacation in more than 15 years. When I do, I will let you know!”

Confident and demanding, Attar remembers being an introverted extrovert as a young girl. “I would play for hours and hours, content with my own company and then in a group, I would be the adventurous one,” she smiles. Iraqi-born and of mixed heritage, she lived in the UK from the age of two, where she was raised before moving to the US to pursue higher education. Her passion for jewelry and fashion took off when she was 15 years old. “My sister took me to a vintage store in the 80s, where I bought the most beautiful beaded 1950s handbag. The rest is history.” Attar traveled to vintage fairs collecting fashion, accessories, and jewelry. “I did this for almost 15 years – relentlessly – and still do if I have the time.”

She realized her passion for all things precious and unique when she became a buyer for Harrods. “We bought the most intricate and beautiful products for the distinguished customer,” she reminisces. She credits her mother – “a woman with a face like Sophia Loren and the mind of Einstein” – for teaching her about elegance, sophistication, the arts, and investing in beautiful pieces that stand the test of time. “She came from an era of glamour, the Fifties, and that has shaped my personal style and my taste in jewelry and fashion.”

Attar is conscious that while her mission is to protect the rich, century-old heritage of Damas Jewellery, which was founded in 1907, it is also to catapult it to today’s world of innovation, pace, and relevancy. “The tone of voice and message was historically male-dominated and male-focused, while the target audience is women,” she says. “Damas recognized that it wanted to drive transformational change and needed a leader to propel this.”

Always keeping an eye on local jewelers and their respective competitive edges, she comments that Intisar by Sheikha

“Faith and VALUES drive my decisions and my AMBITION to leave a LEGACY”

Intisar Salem Al Ali Al Sabbah of Kuwait is on her radar. “I love her collections and passion for social responsibility,” she says. She is also fond of Tarfa Itani, founder of Falamank, for her bespoke heritage pieces, and Nada Le Cavalier, who innovatively combines antique bronzes and artifacts with gold and gemstones. Two international jewelry designers she appreciates are Anabela Chan for her ethically mined gemstones and Aurelie Bidermann for her collectable pieces. Meanwhile, her favorite Damas designer is Iraqi artist-turned-jewelry maker Eyad Blaybil. “I love the work,” she says of the Istanbul-based jeweler. “I wear it most of the time.” Her personal jewels of choice are rings. “They are my signature,” she says. “There

is one ring that has been on my finger for 12 years; that could be because I am an obsessive compulsive. It’s an aquamarine with a quartz-faceted dome that I bought in Barcelona.”

Looking down at her jewels – an eclectic menagerie of large statement pieces – her voice softens with nostalgia. Her parents left Iraq in the 1950s; a 16 and 17-year-old with ambition and vision. Her father, a PhD and one of the pioneers of solar energy, taught her to be humble, charitable, and outspoken if something was unjust. Her mother spent the better part of her life with Parkinson’s disease, “but she still had determination in her eyes,” she adds. “Together, they taught us uncompromising principles and to treat others as we would want to be treated. I live by those tenets every day. Faith and values drive all my decisions and my ambition to leave a legacy and make a difference.” □