

FINAL LOOK

By Daliah Galal
Photographed By Emad Kassem



FACE OF THE FUTURE SAMI AMIN

ACCESSORISING SUCCESS

His eccentric leather and metal accessories are the talk of the town, and his fairytale like stores are a world unto their own. *Enigma* talks to talented designer Sami Amin.

Walking into his castle like store, I find Sami Amin sitting in dim light, surrounded by his designs, as if having a silent conversation with his work. He quickly gets up to greet me. The introductions are humble, and he ensures the surrounds feel like home. Refreshments are served, pleasantries are mulled over, and then, with nothing but a peaceful smile on his face, the designer, artist and creative thinker, talks gently about his journey to success.

Thirty-something Amin graduated in 1988 with a Bachelor Degree in Fine Arts, specialising in Architecture. "I've always had a passion

for art," he says, explaining how his mother discovered his talent when she came across drawings all over his childhood textbooks. An avalanche of sketchbooks and paints followed, but years later, having just graduated, Amin would find himself unhappy working as an engineer. "I was not comfortable with my work," he says. "I didn't feel like I belonged." So he took the leap, and devoted himself to what he does and loves best - art, design and handicrafts. Not everyone was happy. "A lot of people didn't really approve of what I was doing," he says. "My friends used to laugh at me; they'd say I was giving up engineering to become an earring salesman!"

Amin remained undeterred. Influenced by Egyptian artist and designer Mohamed Abaza, and inspired by the great Nubian and Ancient Egyptian cultures, he found himself a little workshop and got started on his unconventional designs. "I love the spirit and soul of those great cultures - their jewellery, their colours, their art and even their way of life. Certain images became ingrained in my head, and without thinking I found that my designs were influenced by them."

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At first he indulged hours in copper design, moulding unusual and stunning accessories out of the malleable metal. He then started integrating leather into his work, creating beautiful wallets and belts. However, the money was slow to come, and in the early days Amin was barely covering his costs. Yet his unrelenting passion ensured his self-belief and determination never wavered. "The products were so unusual, that people were slow to understand and accept them," he explains. He refused to compromise his vision. Although the designs were eccentric, they remained rooted in Egypt's rich cultural heritage. "The materials reflect the culture I come from," he says. "There is no point in simply copying foreign designs."

Yet the market was only the first of many obstacles. Having never studied accessory design, he endured a long process of trial and error, experimenting with time-consuming methods and techniques. "I never used traditional methods of design," he says passionately. "I created my own way of working." Even then, it was almost impossible to find the right quality materials. "The resources in the Egyptian market are very limited," he explains. "I wasted a lot of time trying to get hold of the smallest things, like zippers for example!" Eventually, Amin started designing and producing those tiny but necessary items himself.

“Don’t dream when you have no basis to dream. You have to know even dreams will cost you something”

Yet life remained unstable. With the government unwilling to give many Egyptian workshops legal working permits, Amin found himself having to constantly up and move. A situation that could have proved "fatal" since the quality of the final product is highly dependent on the quality of the workshop and its workers. "It is a very tough market and it does not allow anyone to grow," he says with frustration visible on his face.

Finally deciding enough was enough, he opened his first store in Cairo's high-end Zamalek district. Not long after, he launched a second shop in Heliopolis, and ever since, Egyptian

fashionistas have been flocking to his stores, desperate to get their hands on one of his exclusive designs. "In order to succeed, there always has to be a strategy or plan," he says. "You cannot be successful if you leave it up to luck or chance. One should know exactly what his givens are. Do not dream when you have no basis to dream. You have to know that even dreams will cost you something. You have to know you must work really hard for success. You have to dream in a realistic way!"

Amin is one man whose dreaming has paid off, and yet despite his success, he remains endearingly modest. "I can't take credit for any of it," he says. "God gave me the talent and he granted me success, so it's all nothing but a blessing from Him." ■

THE ENIGMA QUESTIONNAIRE

What 5 words best describe you?

Sensitive, honest, risk taker, persistent and a visionary.

What's your most valued quality?

I really value human relations. They're more important to me than anything else.

One quality you'd like to change about yourself?

I need to trust people more and be less sensitive.

Do you have any hidden talents?

I can fish and dive.

What qualities do you most dislike in people?

Not being clear and direct.

What do you find attractive in a woman?

Her personality and tenderness.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

Honesty is always rewarded.

If you could change one thing about the Middle East, what would it be?

There's so much I wouldn't know where to start!

What do you love most about the Middle East?

The warmth in relationships.

What keeps you up at night?

Thinking.

What's your biggest regret?

Trusting the wrong person.

What makes you laugh?

My friends.

What do you always carry with you?

My sketchbook, my pens, and my mobile. Tooth brush & toothpaste!

What's book has most affected you?

The Prophet by Jibran Khalil

