

Modesty on the Runway

*by Kelly Izdihar
Photographs courtesy of Rabia Z.*



Rabia Zargarpar is a designer who is taking the fashion world by storm.

Graceful models in billowy gowns, sporty jacket suits and elegant *abaya*-styled evening wear are a few of the things you might see when Rabia Z fashions are on the runway. Her designs have been called sophisticated, stylish, modern and hip. In a variety of cuts, patterns and colors, they range from *guthra* piping on track suits, to pleated black trench suits, to soft golden silk gowns. Her creativity is boundless, but what has helped Rabia Z earn her stellar success is her unique eye for fashion and her desire to create modest clothing for Muslim women.

Rabia Z, short for Rabia Zargarpar, is a young Emirati-Afghani designer who has taken the fashion world by storm. She was born and raised in the cosmopolitan city of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, where her stylish mother, with her keen eye for fashion, ran a clothing boutique. From a young age, Rabia lived immersed in the clothing industry where her





mother often took her to tailor shops to see clothing production first hand. As a teenager, her interest blossomed when her friends commissioned her to create dresses and party gowns for fancy wedding receptions.

A few twists and turns almost derailed her fashion career – a decision to study medicine and then law – before Rabia decided to follow her passion and pursue a career in fashion design. Living in the United States at the time, she attended both the New York Fashion Institute and the Fashion Academy of San Francisco. There she studied business management along with fashion design, and took the opportunity to work in retail for the legendary designer, Valentino while taking courses at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York.

Her commitment to designing modest clothing evolved gradually, as Rabia's faith in Islam deepened. When she decided to dress more conservatively, she found that most American clothing stores had little to offer. Like many other Muslim women she wanted clothing that was not only modest, but modern. That's when she started her online business almost nine years ago. She made tunics and skirts, and offered *shayla* scarves imported from Dubai. Her stylish tunics were a hit among Muslim women searching for something simple, practical and chic.

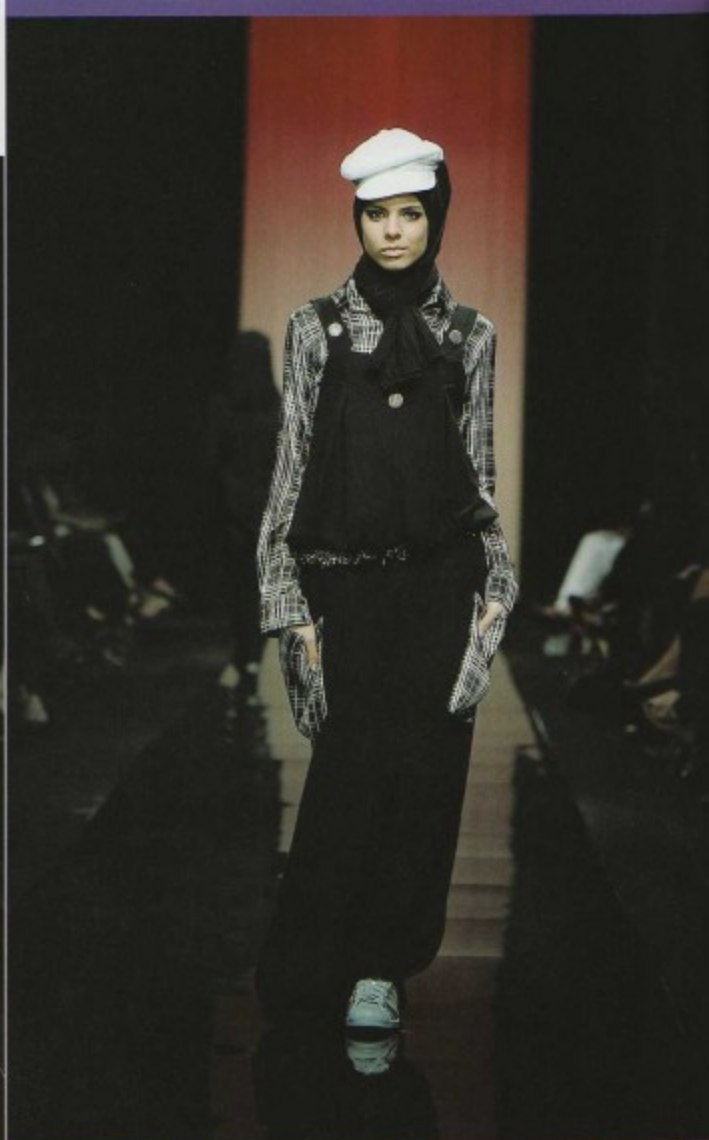
Through her designs, Rabia offered options that would free Muslim women of the trend of matching and layering. Rabia says, "Muslim women have become masters of layering and matching. We go to this store to get one piece, then another store to match that piece, and then a jacket or long sleeve shirt to cover the piece! Through my brand, I hope to give Muslim women the option of a one-stop-shop and to offer them a wide variety of conservative chic ready-to-wear that is currently not available in the mainstream market."

After moving back to Dubai from the





United States, the designer received her major fashion break in 2007 when, a student of the French Fashion Institute ESMOD, she was invited to present her work at Dubai Fashion Week. She decided to take a chance and present her modesty wear, beginning with a beautiful jumpsuit paired with a reconstructed oriental embroidered long silk coat. Although she faced some skepticism, she stuck to her creative and spiritual instincts and her critics were silenced when she won the Emerging Talent Competition. The media coverage was exuberant. Her fans, Muslims and non-Muslims, were excited and surprised to see innovative cutting edge fashion informed by Islamic principles.



While showing that Islam and fashion are not incompatible, she was instilling an understanding that showing skin does not equate to appearing fashionable. Proving that fashionable clothing does not need to be skin tight or revealing, Rabia went on to receive more awards and invitations to show her collections. She was invited to show her collection in Fashion Weeks in Milan, New York, London and Abu Dhabi. In 2008, she was awarded the International Young Fashion Entrepreneur of the Year title by the British Council for the United Arab Emirates, Gulf Cooperation Council and the Mediterranean region. Rabia has received accolades all over the world, including being listed as one of the top 100 Most Influential Arab Personalities in the World.

Her work is informed by a variety of influences and a mixture of the classical and contemporary. She combines

a range of elements in her multiple clothing lines – Eastern and Western, Arab and Islamic, modern and traditional. “After launching with the Rabia Z label, I felt diversification was the key to catering to the needs of the varied demographic requirements of my Muslim sisters around the world,” says Rabia.

Rabia’s world travels and sensitivity to her clients’ needs have led to the development of a variety of styles and levels of covering. Her goal is to take her labels to the mainstream market. She has worked hard to brand her clothing labels so that they can be sold in major malls and retail stores around the world. Rabia Z is one step closer to that dream as one of her recently launched high street sub-label, RUBY, can



be found at *Splash*, a major department store chain and the largest retailer in the Gulf & Middle East. Rabia Z shares a label, Conservative Couture, with another talented regional designer, Amber Feroz.

Despite her dizzying schedule of designing, creating, meeting with clients, traveling the world and giving interviews, Rabia is also a wife and mother. She thanks her Creator for all of the blessings in her life and she praises her husband for his endless support. "*Alhamdulillah* I'm very happy to have his support and encouragement for what I do," she says. "Don't let anything stop you from fulfilling your dreams. We all have challenges, but pursue your dreams and know that it's possible for you to achieve them."

Her collection and latest designs can be found at www.rabiaz.com. 🌿

