

On The Verge

# Master of One

In a market landscape where brands clamour to increase revenues by being jacks of all trades, Ammara Yaqub finds her niche in being the master of one.

BY DEBRINA ALIYAH



**TOPS UP**  
The sanger cape top and the Ginsberg top with flared sleeves.

A HARVARD MBA-WIELDING FASHION DESIGNER is probably one of the least likely types you might come across, but the academic framework might have been the catalyst to Ammara Yaqub's foresight on fashion's evolving market rules. "The fashion calendar is broken – furs ship in August and chiffons ship in January and the customer has become trained to wait for sales," she says. After a brief but successful stint as a full — collection concept, the designer turned her eponymous brand into a mono-category offering, mastering the art of the perfect shirt.

The move is both a reaction to the evolving consumer needs and a return to the designer's own style sensibilities. "I would design coats and dresses and then design a shirt to fill in the holes and being that I am almost exclusively a jeans and top person, it seemed inauthentic," she says of her previous venture. Noticing a gap for well-made and affordable tops, Yaqub made the decision to focus exclusively on producing quality shirts, an often overlooked staple in the wardrobe of the modern women. "The white shirt has always been the perfect mix of modern and timeless, feminine

and androgynous. There is a sharpness that it adds to an outfit and I like nothing more than a beautifully tailored white shirt tucked into a beautiful trouser!" Refined au courant design aesthetic that is both modern and timeless form the bedrock of her pieces, giving them a versatile and dependable role in the modern women's style arsenal.

By adopting a different business model in going straight to the consumer, Yaqub removed the retail mark-up element that has long been an unspoken bane in the complicated wholesale chain ingrained in the fashion industry. The decision afforded her the freedom to seek out the best fabrics to construct her pieces without inflating the retail price. "I curate the most luxurious fabrics and produce every shirt in New York at the same factories that produce top America designer labels," she explains. "I get countless calls from boutiques to wholesale my shirts and it is very tempting at times to take on a lucrative order. But the new Yaqub is all about providing women superior quality for the price."

The alternative business approach is of course made possible by the growing prowess of e-commerce. Initially shipping only



**ALL THE DETAILS**  
 Clockwise from top left: The bestselling Bell top in stripes; white pony hair detailing on the Peron top; the oversized cuffs on the signature Carson shirt.

to the United States, the brand now has a global following that reaches to Australia. While Yaqub may not provide the traditional sensory experience of touching and trying on a new piece for the first time, it is however benefitting from the rise of social media and the market of women who increasingly shop online with less time to physically be in stores. “We have close to 10,000 followers on Instagram and it drives a tremendous amount of traffic to our site. E-commerce, particularly when managed by a brand, provides us a unique opportunity to tell our story in the way that it is meant to be,” the designer comments.

*'The collection pays tribute to each individual's own version of America.'*

Debuting with twelve designs ranging from the traditional white shirt to a backless silk halter top, new styles are launched throughout the year. Most recently, the brand released a series of modern designs in a subtle color palette of the American flag including a playful asymmetric one-sleeve ruffle top, a V-neck blouse with bell sleeves and a crop top made of custom macramé lace stars. The new designs were launched in partnership with non-profit Running Start to promote female leadership, a cause close to the designer's heart. “The collection pays tribute to each individual's own version of America,” she says. Running Start is a nonpartisan organization that has given over 12,000 young women the skills and inspiration necessary to run and win since its inception 12 years ago. Yacub herself is a symbol of female empowerment, having moved to America from Pakistan to further her studies and cut her teeth at Wall Street before pursuing a fashion career in giants including Louis Vuitton. With Yaqub, she puts together the best of her skills and passion in a venture she can call her own. ■

