

The Tenth Pearl

Rola Kassem

Lebanon's Number One
Purrler



When Rola Kassem was invited to Japan, she wasn't expecting the trip to be life-changing. Though she had already been working in the jewelry industry and was on the verge of opening her own shop, the trip to Japan would prove to be a source of life-long inspiration and work ethic. Having chosen Saifi Village to open her jewelry gallery Purrl, the first of which to appear in Lebanon, Rola Kassem speaks about pearls, the Japanese and local designers.



Why did you call your store, "Purrl"?

It's a play on the word "purr" and how women react when they receive jewelry.

Can you tell us about the designers you carry?

The designers I carry in my store are mostly Lebanese, and they are designers with whom I've worked before. They need a platform to expose their work, but they are not yet ready to open their own stores. I also bring others, but right now the market is down. But at one moment, I had a French designer and a Saudi designer. They come and go. Some have been with me for years, but this is why I consider it a jewelry gallery that is also a high-end pearl store.

You have a lot of photos of Hollywood icons, along with Japanese elements throughout your shop. How do you mix Japanese, American and Lebanese culture together?

At times, I follow seasons, sometimes I follow holidays, but what you're seeing in the store is photos



of icons like Audrey Hepburn and Elizabeth Taylor, because they wore pearls in such a fantastic way that they became "Pearl Divas". They gave a new dimension to the pearl, and the object started being associated with glamorous young people.

Is there another country you bring pearls from, or is it only Japan?

The pearls are not only originally from Japan, but the company I work with is Japanese. I am connected to Japan, because I learned the business of pearls from them. Pearls are a part of their everyday life from the moment they're born to the moment they pass. And the way they treat the pearl itself, you feel it's something that's very precious. You fall in love with them because they are natural gems that look beautiful on their own. Also, the Japanese are a very meticulous and honest people, and I feel comfortable and enjoy doing business with them.

Some pearls though, come from Australia, some come from Tahiti, among other countries.

You work with other stones as well though?

Yes, there are other semi-precious stones that are worked into the designs. You have to keep up with the business and what's happening around you.

Do you find other designers inspiring?

Of course, other artists influence you. Just going to other exhibitions, you get influenced by jewelry and fashion.

How do you feel about certain trends coming now, like wearing rings on all fingers?

I love everything that is not very common, even in jewelry. I feel ok with these trends as long as they suit the person. And I think women tend to know what works best for them. If it makes you feel happy, why not?



Do you only sell jewelry in Lebanon?

There are certain exhibitions throughout the Arab world, where we have access to other markets, but this is our only shop.

Can you tell me about your current collection?

I don't do collections by season. If you look at magazines, you see most collections are organized by seasons, such as winter collection or summer collection. What I have is this collection, and it's sort of just an ongoing collection that goes through transformations. I do collections whenever I am inspired by something, not because the weather is changing. Throughout my career, I have had more than eight or nine collections, but they were not focused on seasons.

Do you have a favorite pearl?

I do not actually. I love pearls in general, each and

every pearl makes you like it for a particular quality it has.

How do you feel about the notion that pearls are meant for older women?

Pearls should not be linked to the elderly! There is a young generation that likes what we're doing with our pearls, because they can be very versatile and can look very beautiful on the young. You can work with pearls just as you can with other stones.

Any big events planned for the year?

I have plans to release some new designs, and I need to keep producing and creating new ideas. But yes, there are a few big pieces with mostly pearls that are coming out. I might have a big event coming around Christmas, but I rather see where I'm going first before mentioning it.



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