



Kufri's Tribal table runner in Black and Sanjana Stripe dinner napkins in Grey (sets of four) are sold on the website. Textiles such as Raw Solids in Biscuit and Grey, below, and Sahara in Copper Gold, bottom, are sold by the yard to designers.

Photos by Esther Huynh



The Fabric of Life

The warp and weft of a textile designer's journey takes her from Mumbai to Fort Worth to a home studio in Dallas. **By Babs Rodriguez**

M

ili Suleman was born in Mumbai, India, and grew up in Oman. An uncle and aunt in Houston first drew her attention to Texas; TCU's journalism program lassoed her into Fort Worth. An adaptable woman, she ended up with a sociology degree when — having grown up speaking British English — she unexpectedly found American spelling rules inscrutable. Various career opportunities followed her graduation in 2002, but none satisfied a growing itch for entrepreneurial creative work.

Inspired by graphic design courses at Collin County Community College, Suleman opened Schnauz Design studio in Richardson. But the subtleties of textile arts — the difference between chiffon and silk, the subtleties of weave that distinguish Indian, African and Chinese fabrics — and a desire to remain connected to her mother back in Oman continued to call to her.

"I grew up with textiles. It was a tradition for women to shop at the many fabric stores, dream up patterns and then go to the tailor to get clothes



Pillows like these, shown covered in Rex and Takamaka textiles in Grey and Blue, are finished in Dallas and sold on the Kufri website.

The Fabric of Life

stitched. This happened at least once a month," she says, recalling excursions with her creative and accomplished quilt-artisan mother.

When she traveled with her mom to India, she was hooked by artisanal weaving, the magical sound of the shuttle and clacking wooden looms. "I loved everything that went into making woven cloth. Unlike printed cloth where the fabric usually comes from a huge mill, woven textiles have many hands involved from the very beginning. Spinning, making cones, warping — it's very organic, laborious and very artful."

The 36-year-old launched Kufri, her second business, three years ago. The textile studio joins Schnauz (she still accepts the occasional graphic design job) at her '70s ranch-style Dallas home. She works in an airy and minimally decorated space. On



Textiles designed by Suleman, left to right: Raw Solids in Grey; Tribal in Biscuit; Sahara in Copper Gold; and Sur.

tidy display are more than 45 textiles of Suleman's design, all created in weaving communities in India, where she travels at least once a year. A new collection inspired by the Ivory Coast's Baule tribe features textured neutrals in a palette of creams, grays, black and white. She appreciates

splashes of pink, teal and indigo in contrasting fabrics, but considers texture her calling card.

Kufri sells locally made finished goods that feature Suleman's textiles — pillows and table linens — online; fabric is sold to the trade both online and at showrooms in Austin, New York City and Canada. The designer sees more brick-and-mortar retailers in her future. She also looks forward to custom work and collaborations such as one Kufri has with GAIA, a Dallas-based accessories line handmade by resettled refugee women.

As for Suleman's business name? Kufri is a small hillside rest station outside Shimla, India, where travelers and climbers stop to refresh and rejuvenate. Suleman has taken it as the name of both her studio and her brand. "The name speaks to what I want my brand to be — inspirational, energizing but also calming." **360**

THE DETAILS

Kufri Milli Suleman's growing textile design business is based in Dallas but works with weaving cooperatives in India to create highly textural fabrics for sale to designers. Finished goods, napkins to pillows, are available for sale at kufrilife.com.



Sean Knight
CUSTOM HOMES

HOMEBUILDING • REMODELING



LUXURY • QUALITY • ELEGANCE

SEAN KNIGHT HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF THE CERTIFIED MASTER BUILDER CORPORATION SINCE 1996