

Good

4 SOUTHERN CITIES
MADE FOR HOLIDAY
SHOPPING p. 28

YOUR NEXT
COZY GETAWAY
RT Lodge p. 24

Grit

MILI SULEMAN
LIVES A
TEXTURED LIFE

P. 74

WOVEN *in the* SOUTH

SKIP THE
SEASONAL STRESS
WE CALLED IN A THERAPIST
P. 66

5 GIFTS TO
GIVE BACK
P. 52



Beholden Issue

NOV - JAN

WOVEN IN THE SOUTH

The perfect imperfections
of Mili Suleman and KUFRI

WORDS BY MALLORY LEHENBAUER

PHOTOS BY TERRI GLANGER, ESTHER HUYNH,
KRYSTA JABCZENSKI, LAURE JOLIET, KUFRI, LISA PETROLE

It is impossible to put designer Mili Suleman in a box. She's not only the founder of KUFRI, a handloom weaving textile shop that employs women and aging weavers, but she is a master in the kitchen whose specialty is creating middle eastern sweets. She often finds that her creativity comes to life in a bookstore, and she can make a friend just about anywhere in the world. As a first-generation immigrant, woman of color, and creator, Mili uses something as personal as fabric to weave together multiple cultures, the art of slow living, and imperfection to create KUFRI.



Mili uses something as personal as fabric to weave together multiple cultures, the art of slow living, and imperfection to create KUFRI.

Mili grew up in the Middle East in Oman and came to the United States as a student at Texas Christian University. She said her experience growing up in Oman was quaint, but everything changed when her family got MTV.

"We finally got MTV when I was 13, and I was like 'Oh my god there's a whole other world out there!'"

From that moment she knew she was destined for an adventure, and she planned to attend college in America.

"I wanted to create my own life," she explained. "That has always been a theme in my life. There is a very fiercely independent streak in me. I wanted to make my own mark and create my own life, even though there have been a lot of sacrifices and stupid decisions along the way."

Mili started working as a graphic designer after graduating from college, but her personal life became a struggle.

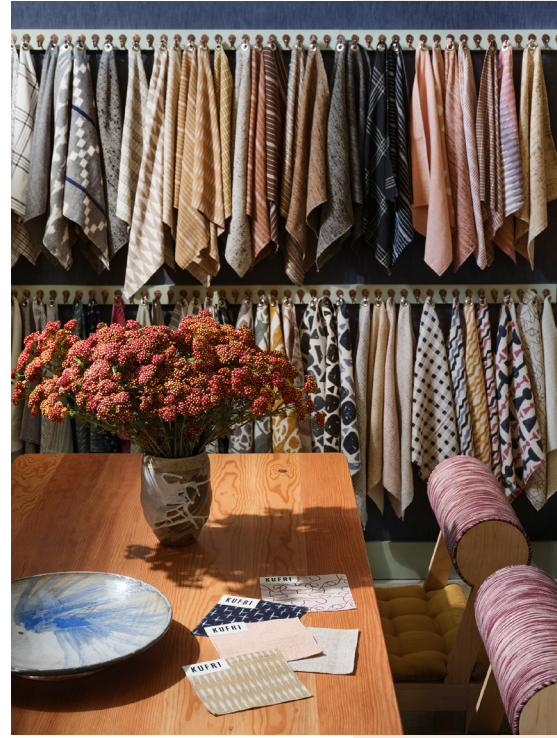
"There was a very dark period in my life here, which is where I think my true character was formed," she explained. "And I think all that grit we talk about—I think that is when that grit was starting to take shape for me."

Mili found herself in an unhealthy relationship with a partner dealing with addiction. It led her to move back home to the Middle East, but after a month knew she had to return to the United States. She came back, worked as a graphic designer, and moved in with a woman she found on Craigslist. This woman saw her struggling and sat her down for a talk.

"It saved my life," she said. "Otherwise I would have never gotten a divorce. I would have probably still been in that situation. That was a turning point in my life—I say that she's my angel."

She continued working in graphic design after her divorce, but realized that she was on a different journey creatively and eventually booked a trip to India with her parents.

"I went from graphic design into the unknown world of textiles because I wanted to dig into something more involved, and also possibly be closer to my family in the Middle East," she said. "To me, textiles are a connector. It allows me to connect



"Our clothes touch our skin, our hands touch the fabric on an armchair as we curl into it... it's a sensory experience that can ground us."



with people in different countries. Textiles are also important to me because it's such an integral part of our lives, but we don't think about it too much. Our clothes touch our skin, our hands touch the fabric on an armchair as we curl into it... it's a sensory experience that can ground us."

Textiles felt more tactile and complex, allowing Mili to flex some new creative muscles while designing within the grid of fabric and weaving.

"I've had to learn how to be flexible with myself and allow myself to make lots of mistakes as I search for my creative path," Mili explains. "After years of soul-searching for my purpose, I realized my true purpose is rather simple... to create a meaningful life by means of exploration and learning."

KUFRI was created out of the idea that perfection was unnecessary and that there is always room for improvement and exploration. The way Mili explains this is that handloom weaving allows for imperfections, but not flaws.

"What I love the most about weaving is that it's not perfect—it's a reflection of the weavers' energy," she explains. The weavers of KUFRI fabrics are from villages all over India. They work on their fabric throughout the day, which often means that the beginning of the fabric is taut and consistent, but as the day goes on and the weaving continues, you may start to notice more imperfections as their energy wanes.

"I think that's so personal and so interesting," Mili explains, "You can get something so personal from someone that you can tell when they took their tea break."

The way the textiles are made represents the way that Mili sees the world and aspires to live thoughtfully. It is important to her that consumers consider where the fabrics they use come from.

"At KUFRI, our textiles are made in small batches using handmade processes: spinning the yarn by hand, dyeing the yarn by hand, weaving or block-printing a fabric by



“I realized my true purpose is rather simple... to create a meaningful life by means of exploration and learning.”

hand—this ensures the heritage textile processes continue and that the villages can continue to sustain themselves,” she explains.

This kind of production is different from other faster means of production like factories and the use of synthetic fibers. KUFRI fabrics are designed and created with intention and the purpose of longevity,

“I love using my fabrics throughout my home—as upholstery, drapery, pillows, a dish towel, setting the table with napkins; these are moments of slow living for me,” Mili said, “They help me pause, connect with something I know was made ethically and artfully.” GG



How Mili Celebrates the Holidays

We don't have any special traditions since it's just my husband and myself, but we always get into the holiday spirit by putting up a nice Christmas tree. My favorite part is the baking—there's always lots and lots of baking (and eating) happening throughout the holiday. I love the smell of fresh baked goods in the house! And of course we get together on different occasions with my husband's family and some friends.