

# VOGUE

ARABIA

APRIL 2018

## MAKING HISTORY

Princess Noura  
Bint Faisal Al Saud  
leads Saudi  
Arabia's first  
fashion week

*Is wearing*  
**PLASTIC**  
*as transparent*  
*as it seems?*

ADWOA ABOAH

# The FACE of NOW

INTERVIEWED BY MARIA GRAZIA CHIURI

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**FAR LEFT** THE NEW STORE IN THE DUBAI MALL **LEFT** AXEL DE BEAUFORT **BELOW LEFT** THE BESPOKE HERMÈS BAG CREATED FOR THE DUBAI MALL STORE

# Only HANDMADE BESPOKE

Hermès opens its first boutique in the Arab world dedicated to made-to-measure orders in The Dubai Mall. Axel de Beaufort, artistic director of Hermès Sur-Mesure, talks making dreams a reality

Inside the pocket-sized tome *An ABC of Hermès Crafts* by Olivier Saillard is a vocabulary of 100 words dedicated to skill artistry. Primarily in French, these are the words used to describe the gestures of the men and women inside Hermès who specialize in 16 distinct crafts. It documents a special history – one that has been passed on for generations. Of course, Hermès has designed bespoke pieces since it came to be as a harness-maker in 1837. Now, for the first time in the Middle East, a boutique has opened in the new extension of The Dubai Mall to celebrate the house's handcrafted pieces. The 976 sqm space was designed by Parisian architecture firm RDAI under the direction of Denis Montel.

To mark the occasion, it created two bags. Both black, the clutch was inspired by leather items from the Twenties. It references a piece within the *conservatoire*; a secret place where Hermès archives are kept and a great source of inspiration for those making bespoke Hermès today, namely the department's artistic director, Axel de Beaufort. He shares that the new Dubai store ordered the commission. "They wanted a very dark black, and so different types of leather, including precious skins, were used to create a landscape that reflects various shades of *noir*," he notes. "Sometimes it's good to look backwards," he comments. "We care for the preciousness of craftsmanship." He leafs through an exclusive book (only 50 were printed) that documents the year's bespoke projects. It is confidential and shown only to Hermès clients. "We like to write the story of an object. After all, it exists



through its story. Just look at the Birkin," he notes. Each project is unique. One client ordered boxing gloves; another wanted a bicycle.

In 2014, former French president François Hollande offered Queen Elizabeth II a set of Hermès photo albums of her previous visits to France. The 40-year-old de Beaufort oversees all international bespoke orders from Paris. He moves easily through the showspace, speaking quickly; his deep voice echoes inside a large hangar that was once a cinema studio belonging to French director Luc Besson. It is where the *conservatoire* is located, along with the workshop where some 10 men and women are hunched over in concentration. A second workshop, where made-to-measure bags are made, is located on rue Faubourg Saint-Honoré. While Hermès still makes about 500 unique saddles a year, it has expanded to create commissions pertaining to accessories, furniture, and just about any means of transportation available today. Technology has played a central role in this expansion. De Beaufort points to a model of a boat inside a glass case. "When we speak of technology, perhaps it's not in a sense that people recognize, at first. With this boat we wanted to create a proper swimming platform at the front, and open the hull for direct access to the water. If you don't have the expertise to understand how this works, you won't be able to push the boundaries of innovation." He navigates between bespoke leather helicopter seats to a skateboard featuring colorful print on wood. "Here, we wanted to create the look of stickers. It took a year to determine how to transfer the pigment to the resin. It looks like it's handpainted," he marvels, running his hand along the smooth maple.

De Beaufort's path to Hermès started at his great-uncle François de Lamothe's work table in the south of France. "He was an award-winning cinema decorator; an old kid. I learned to draw with him and dream big." De Beaufort met Pierre-Alexis Dumas, artistic director of Hermès in 2012. "They asked me for my vision of a project, but I can't tell you what," his blue eyes twinkle. Since joining Hermès in 2013, the department he leads has blossomed into a fully-fledged operation. It remains to be seen what commissions the Arab world will dream up – but de Beaufort and his team will be up for the challenge.



# VOGUE

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حاورتها MARIA GRAZIA CHIURI