

Junayd Miah

The founder of a design house that aims to link East and West through fashion

It's not often religion and fashion come together to create a successful business, but that is what's happening at the Islamic Design House. Based in Mile End, in the east end of London, just a few miles from where its founders grew up, this enterprise aims to take the best of Western creativity and match it to the elegant calligraphy and modest style of the East and Islam.

Junayd Miah, who runs the growing online outlet with several partners, says the idea behind the business stems from his days as a student. "Studying economics and politics, then spending three years as a scholar of Islam and the Arabic language, proved to be a turning point in my life. For the first time, my mind was opened up to the rest of the world, as well as to my faith, and I began to question my role in both. It was quite profound."

Fresh from this epiphany, the 29-year-old bumped into an old friend, Harun Rashid. They and three other friends realised no one was producing fashionable, attractive clothing for young women that adhered to the Muslim code of modesty. "We are part of a special group as second- or third-generation Muslims living in Britain," says Miah. "We're brought up in the West, but steeped in a culture that's rooted in the East.

No one was catering for both."

So the friends put together a business plan and found a factory in Bangladesh that would produce the small runs they required. They then extended their ideas to men's fashion, finding a way to reference Islam on westernised casualwear. "I wear jeans and hoodies, but I wanted them to reflect my identity as a Muslim," says Miah."

With sweatshirts, jilbabs and hijabs in a variety of unusual colours and materials, they were ready to found Silk Route, named for the ancient road that links the East to the West.

With the label selling well through wholesalers around London, the team decided to widen the net and, through St Martin's College of Art and Design, began collaborating with two more designers. Working under the labels Aerosol Arabic and Visual Dikhr, both designers shared the same vision as Miah and his partners.

The result is a growing collection of original,



affordable fashionwear, homewear and jewellery – from vases etched with Kufic script to delicate glass headscarf pins and bold art prints that blend street graffiti with traditional calligraphy. The Islamic Design House is not stopping there, however, and Miah’s grand plan includes flagship stores in London and major Muslim cities before moving onto North America and France.

Miah hopes their unique brand will act as a positive force. “Like the Silk Route, which has long been about people from different parts of the world interacting, we want to embrace Eastern and Western cultures. This is building bridges.”

Kate Riordan; portrait by Gemma Day

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