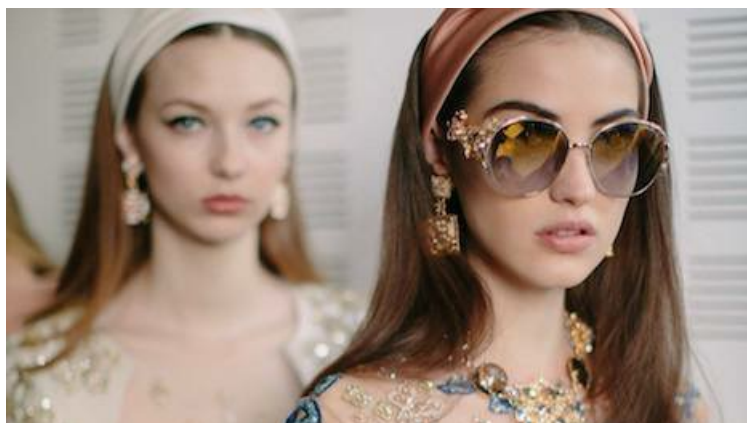


APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## Emerging Middle Eastern talents have chance on their side thanks to social media

April 6, 2017



*Elie Saab eyewear*

By JEN KING

MUSCAT, Oman Despite the many high-quality dressmakers working in Beirut, Lebanon during Elie Saab's childhood, the profession of fashion designer was unheard of when the couturier set out to establish his namesake brand.

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The Beirut of Mr. Saab's childhood during the 1960s and 1970s was vibrant, joyful and glamorous, as the city enjoyed a golden age, being dubbed the Paris of the Middle East. However, by the time Mr. Saab was a teen, civil war had broken out and the Beirut of his childhood was gone, but the turmoil of his situation instilled a drive in the designer to leave his Middle Eastern roots and use his designs as an escape.

"I worked very hard for my vision," said Elie Saab, executive chairman, founder and creative director at **Elie Saab Group**. "I built my first workshop at 18, I wanted to prove myself for my family and my country.

"I worked a lot to get here," he said. "Nothing is by chance. But it is very important to work in the right direction, always."

### Memories of Beirut

Today, Mr. Saab has established himself as an international name in fashion, but the path taken was not easy.

While there were skilled dressmakers, Mr. Saab had to work around the notion that there was no such thing as a fashion designer in the region. To achieve his dream, Mr. Saab had to work tirelessly to prove himself, not only to his family but also to his country and the Middle East that fashion is a viable option.

During Conde Nast International's "Mindful Luxury" conference April 5, Mr. Saab shared his inspirational story, telling International Vogue editor Suzy Menkes and attendees of the challenges he faced.

At 18 years old he opened his first workshop, showing his debut collection in Beirut. Soon thereafter, Mr. Saab relocated to Rome and then to Paris to continue working to achieve his vision.

Mr. Saab explained that his brand was not developed overnight. The success of the Elie Saab brand is rooted in time,

strategy and cautious planning.

Likewise, Mr. Saab's success was due to hard work, dedication and personal perseverance, as he feels nothing was by chance. Despite his own beginnings, Mr. Saab feels that today's emerging Middle Eastern designers will be more subjected to chance as social media can be leveraged to promote and share talent.

Mr. Saab is also bettering the chances of emerging fashion designers in Beirut through an educational program with the Lebanon-American University, an endeavor he says is the "minimum" of what he can do to assist the next generation of creative talent.

The program's first class of fashion designers will graduate this year. Mr. Saab's program has seen a high demand in the region.

#### Haute couture and handwork

A primary element of Elie Saab's haute couture designs is their intricate beaded handwork created in the label's Beirut studio. Mr. Saab explained that haute couture handwork is extremely important, as the skilled artisanship takes the couture creation to another level.

Although many young consumers are moving away from material goods, haute couture is seeing a renaissance.

At Elie Saab, women who want to look chic for an important occasion are turning to the brand, therefore propelling demand for its haute couture designs. Mr. Saab believes that interest in haute couture is bound to continue, as these pieces are an elevation of luxury.

While haute couture and red carpet dressing are a sense of pride for Mr. Saab, the designer understands that to truly be an established brand, there is a need for multiple entry points. Accessibility is achieved through accessories such as handbags, fragrance and sunglasses.

The latter category, a first for Elie Saab, will be carried out through a nine-year licensing deal with Safilo.

Signed Sept. 1, the agreement brings the house's craftsmanship and feminine fashions to a new product category, opening up the brand to a more aspirational audience than its usual creations allow. Much like fragrance and beauty, eyewear is an accessible entry point to a luxury brand.

Elie Saab's collection of eyewear, made in Italy and Japan using precious materials, launched in January 2017 ([see story](#)).



## *Elie Saab eyewear*

Accessories are important to a brand because any consumer, regardless of age or location, can embrace the categories.

Elie Saab is also working to strategically increase its retail footprint. With boutiques in Beirut, Paris and London, Elie Saab recently opened in New York for the first time.

The brand opened its first New York boutique on the city's Upper East Side in March.

Located at 860 Madison Avenue, at the corner of 70th Street, the flagship holds ready-to-wear across two floors. This opening expanded the brand's North American footprint, which was previously limited to Mexico.



### *Elie Saab's New York flagship*

While its ready-to-wear designs are carried at New York retailers such as Bergdorf Goodman and Saks Fifth Avenue, having its own branded point-of-sale in the important market will enable Elie Saab to create more of an immersive experience for consumers ([see story](#)).

Next to open will be an Elie Saab storefront in Geneva in two months' time.

Speaking further on his brand's retail strategy, Mr. Saab said, "I work slowly, but surely.

"This for me is very important," he said. "I always think about my strategy and my planning. We choose a more strategic location to be near our clients and provide good service."

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