

INTERVIEW

Samuel Re-loaded

The celebrated designer returns to his stomping grounds

With a BA Honours degree in Marketing and Fashion Design from the London College of Fashion, London University, and certification in Menswear Fashion from St Martin's College, London, under his belt, Samuel and his label "Samuel H" seemed like an answer to the prayers of the fashionably inclined gentlemen in town.

Determined to make his mark in the sphere of menswear, he made his presence known with blink-and-you'll-miss-it showcases, which kept the press and his clientele wanting more. A few things clicked into place to cement his success. The short-lived, but instantly popular Etc's Fashion Exclusives opened up in Gulshan, curating mostly high-end couture from the likes of Sabyasachi and Manish Malhotra (India) and Deepak Perwani (Pakistan), to name a few. Samuel H was one of the very few exceptions made for local designers. Dia Asiana snapped him up for two shows, and he continued to collaborate with local print media with his style columns, before he joined the editorial board of the Dia Asiana magazine. And then the UK beckoned and he went off to pursue new horizons. Back after nearly a decade, he's ready to reclaim his position as the One to Watch. Star Lifestyle decided to stop for a quick chat with the biscotti-munching designer.

LS: So eight years is really long time! Where's the love?

SH: The love is all there, honest! I had gone back to London to further my education – one must always keep learning, right? I specialised in textile design, and really immersed myself in research, which I think is essential. Not just menswear design - I'm now able to focus on a wider spectrum. My aim was to re-educate myself and learn some new skills, like developing simple fabrics into eye catching prints.

LS: Why textile?

SH: Textile is the belly of any designer's vision, to work, and train. Understanding the importance of a simple fabric in its primary stage, is necessary, as only then can you take it beyond.

LS: And what about work? Surely you wouldn't deprive the masses of your talent?

SH: [laughs] You are too kind! Soon after I went to London, I got an offer to work and create for a reputable fashion store. It was a great opportunity, very Godfather-style - "offer you can't refuse". Contractual intricacies pending, I don't want to elaborate or name-drop, but I promise all will be revealed in due time.

LS: Now that we know what made you leave, what made you come back?

SH: Oh God...it was such a confusing time. Pretty much around the height of my collaboration with the fashion store I just mentioned, my father was diagnosed with cancer. This was about three years ago. It's such a blur. I was going from London to Dhaka to Singapore, rushing from Dad's side to the store, and barely keeping my sanity. It was overwhelming. It all came to a head in February last year, when my contract wrapped up, and my father also lost the battle.

LS: That must have been very difficult.

SH: Yes it was. I felt like the foundations were knocked out from under my feet. I still find it hard to talk about.

LS: Of course. Looking ahead, are you ready for your launch?

SH: As ready as I'll ever be. My studio opens up for business around the 10th Ramadan, InshaAllah, and I shall be launching my collection soon, hopefully in time for Eid shoppers to get a taste.

LS: Can you tell us a bit about your collection?

SH: I don't want to go into too much detail; it will spoil the surprise, but let's just say that all my hard work and research will hopefully show. I like doing traditional wear with a twist, a little bit of my Samuel signature. As I said before, my specialisation is in textile design, so there's a focus on the fabric, and of course, the fit is everything.

LS: What does style mean to you?

SH: Attitude. It's about self-expression one cultivates or possesses over time.

LS: Why do you think men fear fashion?

SH: Men do not fear fashion, per se. But yes they are still "uncomfortable" experimenting with variations in cuts and different shades of colours, out of their comfort box.

LS: If you could have dinner with any person, who would it be?

SH: I do not do dinners but maybe breakfast in a café in heaven, one day maybe, with the late Isabella Blow, to praise and discuss her iconic discovery, Alexander McQueen.

LS: Name a product you're obsessed with.

SH: Dermalogica's Daily Micro Exfoliant.

LS: What's one clothing item one should splurge on?

SH: Jeans, preferably high end European brands only. One cannot beat the texture, quality and cut.

LS: What trend would you wish would die forever?

SH: The Double Denim Look! Please let's leave that to the very tall, European footballers and hip hop artistes or let it die!

LS: What's your favourite decade for fashion?

SH: The decade we are in now, for sure. Such mixture, re-hashing; re-cycling of fashion eras from the past yet constantly, from a European designer's point of view at least, creating new ethos.

By Fatima Hussain

Photo courtesy: Samuel Hoque

It was a love affair that started eight years ago, when Star Lifestyle discovered a then-unknown designer named Samuel Hoque, barely into his twenties, starlight in his eyes, and a capsule collection of suits as his calling card.

Back then, if you wanted a custom suit, you went to your tailor and hoped that he'd be able to make some magic from the eight or nine templates he had in his repertoire.

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