

How Zahia Aroni is shaping a smarter fashion retail culture

She grew up around her father and uncles, who owned a garments manufacturing business that produced high-quality international brands of clothing. Through the years, Zahia Khondoker Aroni developed a keen understanding of fashion, quality control, and consumer needs. This background would later serve as a strong foundation for her insightful approach to the fashion landscape, pushing her to create one of the most compelling brands of her time.

Aroni completed her higher education in London, where she further honed her insights into global fashion trends. Later, she returned to Bangladesh with her brother, and was quick to recognise a significant gap in the local market: while Bangladesh was a powerhouse in garment production, its retail scene felt stagnant and disconnected from global influences.

"We have such a vibrant manufacturing sector, but in comparison, the retail was limited, outdated, and generic," Aroni noted. "Local customers were unable to find any of the styles that were being shipped to international brands with so much gusto, and this was disappointing to see."

This disparity between local production capabilities and consumer desires was the fuel behind the start of her own contemporary clothing brand, Strides Co.

What sets Aroni apart is her astute understanding of the global fashion landscape and how it can be integrated into local preferences.

"I firmly believe that consumers in Bangladesh possess a keen sense of style, often seeking out garments that they see global influencers wearing. They are a very aware and style-conscious bunch," she emphasises. "It is sad that such glaring demand from customers was overlooked or deprioritised for so long, whereas Bangladesh has the spending power — the market itself is a multi-billion-dollar industry!"

A new age philosophy

Aroni's vision for the future of fashion in Bangladesh goes beyond solely aesthetics; she envisions an industry where local brands appreciate the tastes and expectations of their clients, and where customers are empowered to not only dictate but shape the retail culture as one that celebrates their dynamic choices.

"We have the potential to create a market that embraces global styles while remaining true to our roots," she asserts.

From the time Aroni first started her venture, she remembers respecting all body shapes and sizes and being thoroughly diligent about it.

"I had a policy," she shares. "I would send three sizes to my online buyers. They could try on the clothes at delivery and choose what fits them best. The delivery man would happily take the two that did not fit as well."



Aroni also prides herself on introducing sizes such as extra small to triple XL to the market. According to her, fashion should inspire, not exclude.

Her acute understanding of the needs of her target market has encouraged Aroni to incorporate into her online store, technology such as the image reverser that allows customers to see clothes on the international fashion landscape that are similar to what is being offered to them

here. "My target customers are between 20 and 45 years of age.

Aroni's approach to doing business in contemporary times involves a high commitment to sustainability. Acknowledging the heavy environmental impact of the fashion industry in existing times, she intentionally employs the use of long-lasting fabrics that are both kind to the skin and the environment. Her philosophy revolves around continuous

improvement in her packaging, and a dedicated consistency to minimising waste in the form of single-use plastics.

"Sustainability is a journey, not a destination," she remarks, inspiring other entrepreneurs to adopt similar practices in their own ventures.

The young entrepreneur is also passionate about nurturing fresh talent in the fashion industry. By advocating for greater inclusion of aspiring designers, particularly those newly graduating from universities, she seeks to empower a new generation of creatives.

"Collaboration with fresh minds enriches the industry," she states. "As demand for new age products grows, consumers begin expecting fresher designs and top quality. When every business is forced to provide such elevated quality, the entire market benefits."

On the horizon

As she looks towards the future, Aroni aims to create a broader platform that incorporates a variety of timeless essentials, ensuring that consumers have access to versatile and stylish options, including ethnic wear, and perhaps, at some point, even shoes!

"At first, I was convinced that I would create an all-encompassing e-commerce store which would have all types of basic clothing available under one virtual 'roof'," shares Aroni. "As my customer base grew bigger, I began to realise that there was an abject need for a brick-and-mortar presence."

Aroni shared that her first store is due to open next month. As per her unique vision, her store would be a one-of-a-kind collaboration with a café. "I don't want fashion to be rushed," she mentioned. "I want my store to be a calm space, where people can try on their clothes, enjoy the retail process over coffee and companionship.

Her insights provide a roadmap for aspiring entrepreneurs. Aroni encourages newcomers to take risks and embrace the learning process, reminding them that no one is ever fully prepared. "Start small and progress organically. The lessons come from doing and being relentless in your efforts," she advises.

By Munira Fidai
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