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STYLE

Modern Ethnic

Evanna Ramly



Mama Sabeena bag in Uzbekistan silk ikat

A- A A+

Homegrown fashion label Frankitas has been making waves since 2015. The independent company is renowned for its use of traditional textiles, woven and hand-dyed to perfection, and crafted into striking bags and clutches with an exotic twist.

Its unique materials are sourced from skilled crafters in remote areas around Malaysia, Indonesia, India and Central Asia.

Think *ikat*, *batik*, *songket*, *tenun* and *rangrang* – elements that are synonymous with its ethos of curated pieces crafted with style.

In support of Malaysian craftsmanship, 70% of these items are made and tailored locally. As varied as its colourful range, the fans of the brand include designer Adila Long, radio and TV presenter Charmaine Yee as well as former beauty queen Deborah Henry.

World domination

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Frankitas' global expansion kicked off last year with a flagship outlet at Singapore's House of Tang. Quickly added to its impressive list of distributors were partners in San Francisco, Switzerland, Singapore, Tokyo and Bali, not to mention various high-end hotels and resorts across Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and the Maldives.

For 2018, the ever-ambitious brand sets its sights on partners in key markets across the United States and Europe. Meanwhile, its website (www.frankitas.com) has also made e-commerce a vital component in the company's international growth.

Extra, extra

As Frankitas turns three, another collection of contemporary pieces with new designs and fabrics looks set to fly off shelves. True to form, the accessories are testament to a profound love and respect for artisanal heritage.

"The growing demand for our products represents the potential demand of traditionally inspired fashion pieces of great quality," says Francisca Turner Shaik, founder and creative director of Frankitas. "Starting from just chic bags and purses of three designs, we have now extended our line to 11 designs of bags and clutches, silk scarves, jewellery and also home décor, all with a dose of traditional and tropical flavour."

The new collection features the classic envelope clutch, Titin, along with tantalising designs such as Ava, Mama Sabeena, Maren, Lannie and Jikat. The popular Webe bags return in woven rangrang, this time in a cool chevron motif. Other bestsellers include the stunning Tas Malam as well as Lannie and Maren clutches that exude elegance with a free spirit.

"I would really like Frankitas to continuously grow in terms of designs, not only for our bags but also other accessories and home range," says Turner Shaik, who is of Indonesian and English descent. She has lived in Malaysia for 20 years.

"I would also like to position our gallery (in Damansara Heights) to be the go-to place for quality artisanal fashion and home accessories, catering to locals as well as expats in Kuala Lumpur." At the moment, access to Frankitas Gallery is by appointment only.

All heart

In the pipeline is the Frankitas Collective which features handpicked unique pieces from selected brands that have very similar design taste, business and values to Frankitas. Hot off the press is its collaboration with Fugeelah, an upbeat accessories brand driven by the brave children of Deborah Henry's Fugee School.

“Deborah and I attended the same school but we had not seen each other since then. We only caught up earlier this year. I have huge respect and admiration for her, especially what she has done for the Fugee School.”

When Henry shared her vision of creating something to sustain the school, Turner Shaik was happy to help. Together, they brainstormed the idea of Fugeelah as a conscious and self-sustaining brand with a range of accessories crafted by the students.



Turner Shaik (left) and Henry share a strong compassion for children

Style and passion

The project is a personal one that means a lot to her. “I take this role very seriously because I’m responsible not only for the design element but also ensuring the business model works and that it will be sustainable in the long run for the Fugee School and the livelihood of the children. I feel blessed to be a part of it but at the same time, I feel challenged as I’ve never done anything like it before. I do not want to let anyone down and I cannot afford to fail,” says Turner Shaik.

For the past nine years, Fugee School has been working to better the lives of refugee students by giving them access to education.

Clearly, the two old friends share the same values. “Having three children of my own, I thought I had it tough,” Turner Shaik adds. “Then I realised that for Deborah, it must be even tougher as she has been and still is responsible for hundreds of children’s education and

livelihood. We truly believe we need the help of people all around to look after children, no matter who they are and where they come from. For as long as Deborah and the school need me, I will help as much as I can and reach out to as many people who can help, too.”



Maren clutch and Frankitas hat

Beautiful cause

Henry had been thinking about ways to make Fugee School more sustainable. A socially conscious business, she decides, seemed a suitable option.

“Chatting with Francisca, I realised we had common passions for children and education,” says Henry. “She has since gone above and beyond to help us get Fugeelah off the ground, and given me valuable insight and guidance, saving us from making many mistakes.”

Their friendship brings with it a powerful reminder of her mission. “Franki has a heart of gold. We have had many chats on her sofa where she tears up and reminds me why I’ve made this cause a huge part of my life.”

Henry shares that Fugeelah’s tagline is that it takes a village to raise a child but it takes the world to raise children. “Fugeelah is a result of likeminded individuals coming together, pooling their passions and talents to create opportunities and a hopeful future for a group of refugee children. This is a movement, something every one of us can do, and the impact is generational.”

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