

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2016
MIDDLE EAST

AD

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST • GENIUS DESIGNS • INSPIRING ART • LUXURIOUS HOMES



LEGEND
REBORN
CHECK IN
AT THE
RITZ PARIS

35
DÉCOR
TRENDS
*fresh from
the runway*

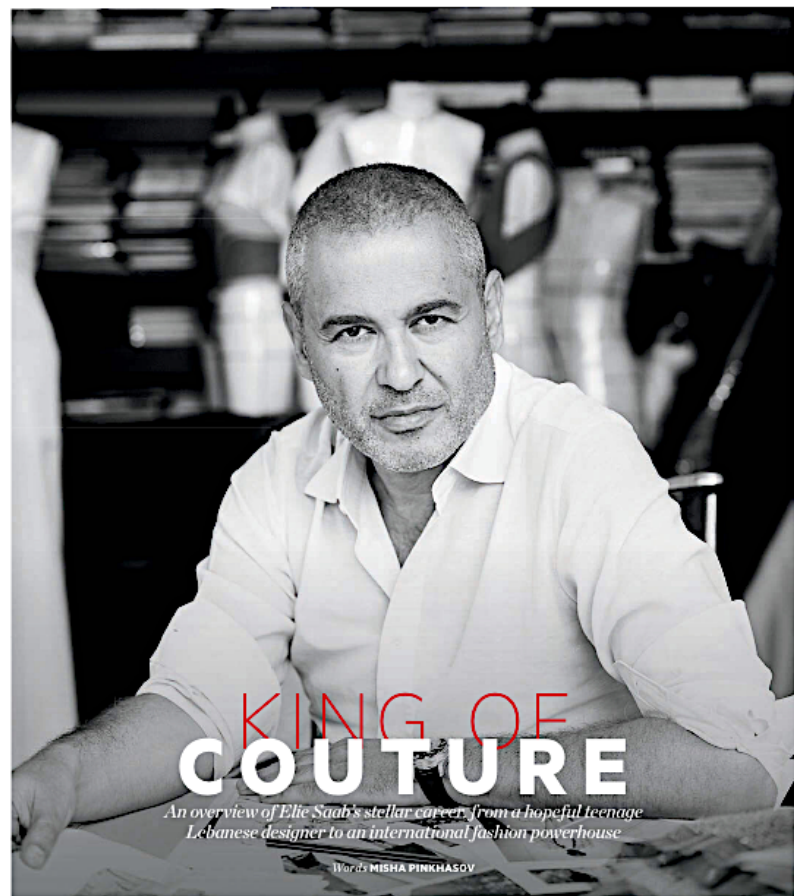
AT
HOME
WITH

Elie Saab

The icon and king of COUTURE guest edits our extravagant FASHION ISSUE

AD *tastemakers*

In LA with **Tomás Maier**, stylish design entrepreneurs **Nina Yashar** and **Cherine Tayeb**, and **Jeff Leatham's** blossoming world



KING OF COUTURE

*An overview of Elie Saab's stellar career, from a hopeful teenage
Lebanese designer to an international fashion powerhouse*

Words: **MISHA PINKHASOV**



HOSE WHO KNOW HISTORY will not be surprised by the wave of luxury now emerging from the Middle East. At least since the time Phoenician purple became fashionable among Ancient Greek royals, European elites have looked to the Levant and beyond for precious stones, silks and spices, exquisite cuts and craftsmanship. Only much later shifts drew sheikhs and shahs to Parisian jewellers and the tailors of Savile Row.

Yet it is no exaggeration to say that designer Elie Saab has helped put Lebanon on the global fashion map. "I started at a very young age and the industry was non-existent in the region," Saab says. When he held his first show in Beirut in 1982 there was not just no fashion industry, but the fabric of Lebanon itself was shredded by civil war.

"My childhood and teenage years were certainly tough, growing up in a war-torn country," Saab says, "but the strength and determination of the Lebanese has also encouraged me to pursue my dreams." There is powerful symbolism in his childhood memory of living amid daily destruction, cutting up news headlines to create beautiful dress patterns.

Saab describes fashion as his destiny. "I used to look at the world around me in a different way from other children. I spent my time watching people and the way they walk or dress. I wouldn't see them as they were, but as they could be if they were dressed differently."

Inspired by Valentino and Christian Dior, Saab says he always wanted to underline a woman's elegance and femininity. Adding, "I am so happy when I sense a woman is delighted and feeling exceptional in her dress; it is such a fulfilling moment."

Saab's first Haute Couture and bridal collections quickly found a home in palaces across the region. Thus having conquered the East, Saab turned his attention westward. He began dressing Hollywood stars in 1996 and took a first step into the European fashion world with his 1997 show in Rome. He launched his ready-to-wear collection in Milan a year later and was invited to show Haute Couture in Paris in 2000. Saab joined the Chambre Syndicale as an associate member in 2003, taking his place alongside non-French designers like Valentino and Giorgio Armani.

Jordan's Queen Rania is a fan, having married King Abdullah II in

Looks from Saab's Autumn/Winter 2016-7 runway presentation. The collection is inspired by New York City, revisiting the silhouette of the Chrysler Building



Halle Berry in the Oscar in Elie Saab

"I am proud of having created a profession which didn't exist in my country before"

ELIE SAAB



A young Saab with his Beirut team

a gold embroidered Saab gown in 1999. Her wearing it at official engagements in the years since speaks to the staying power of Saab's designs. His career took another star turn in 2002, when Halle Berry accepted the Oscar for Best Actress wearing a Saab gown of

sheer red extravagance.

Saab's creations are now regulars in royal and red carpet circles. And unlike other luxury fashion brands, Haute Couture remains his focus even as the ready-to-wear, fragrance and accessories lines grow rapidly reaching a global audience.

A new ready-to-wear bridal line has been met with much enthusiasm. Day, evening and accessories offers are forever expanding. A new eyewear line with Safilo will debut early next year. More perfumes are in the works too. And Saab will open flagship stores in London and New York this year.

Despite this success, Saab remains philosophical. "Success is easy to achieve but very hard to maintain!" he says. "When you become successful, fame follows naturally. But my ambition has always been to create a House for generations to come. My vision is to create not just a series of collections but a complete luxury lifestyle House. This is why I am focusing on developing every aspect of the business simultaneously. I cannot limit myself to a new boutique or product."

That expansive vision is perhaps another influence of Saab's childhood. In interviews, he has recalled watching Lebanon constantly reimagined and rebuilt.

He has also expressed a passion for architecture, which surprises some. Saab's Autumn/Winter 2016-7 collection draws heavily on the look of New York City, offering the stylised silhouette of the Chrysler Building and hints of skyscraper windows glowing in the night. Otherwise, there is little obvious link between architecture's rigid masculinity and permanence, and the fluid femininity of Saab's creations, the most memorable of which might be worn just once. But look deeper: "I have always been a great admirer of Tadao Ando," Saab says. The parallels between the two are impressive: both men are self taught, both have remained constant in their approach over decades, both are humble but masterful in using simple geometries to connect volumes and create evolving perspectives. The emotional impact Ando achieves with dramatic plays of light and shadow, Saab brings out in pairing daring transparency with lavish embroidery and cascades of fabric. To paraphrase Ando, they both work to create something for people's hearts. Both also use their native cultures to build a cosmopolitan aesthetic for a global audience. As a brand born in the Middle East, Saab says, "The House retains strong ties to its origins," adding that he feels a social responsibility to play a role in the prospering of emerging artistic talents. With that, he created the fashion program at Lebanese American University and the Middle East edition of Project Runway, the fashion reality television show. "Today I want to help and encourage talented young generations to pursue a career in fashion design."

