

This Is the Paris Shop Where Haider Ackermann Buys Slippers



JANUARY 23, 2019 3:50 AM
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Lina Audi, Dina Haidar, and Christine Bergstrom
Photo: Courtesy of Liwan



Since 1992, the three strong women behind Liwan, a gem of a boutique in Paris, have been managing to do what many world leaders cannot—promote cross-cultural understanding. They are doing so through handcrafted objects, fashion, and hospitality—not to mention cups of Lebanese coffee and flutes of Champagne—from their base in the Sixth Arrondissement. Catherine Deneuve, Loulou de la Falaise, Tilda Swinton, and Haider Ackermann (who recently posted on Instagram a photo of his striped Liwan slippers) are among those who have trod a path to their door.



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Customers who come for the handcrafted pieces from Lebanon are likely to idle, and that's by design. "Liwan is a meeting place, already by the product, and then by the richness and the diversity of our origins, north and south," says Dina Haidar, one of the founders, who is the shop's commercial director. Visitors to the store are likely to be greeted by Christine Bergstrom, who is the PR director and face of the brand. A former muse of Azzedine Alaïa's and Claude Montana's, Bergstrom remains active in fashion, working with Olivier Saillard on his Models Never Talk and Couture Essentielle performances and appearing in videos currently being shown in Jean Paul Gaultier's Fashion Freak Show at the Folies Bergère, among other things. "We are social creatures, Dina and I," Bergstrom explains. "Lina [Audi] does all the design and production in Beirut and prefers her work to speak for her. So we have to shout about it, since she would be the last person to do so."



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Liwan
Striped babouches
Photo: Courtesy of Liwan



Since the 1970s, Audi has tried to combine innovation with traditional craftsmanship. One of her bright ideas was to use the striped materials of men's djellabas and caftans for women's clothes, as well. These fabrics have been adapted to homewares, a growing category for the brand. Haidar and Audi met in Beirut, and when the former moved to Paris in 1984 to work with the Arab Film Festival, she wore Audi's designs on the red carpet to great acclaim. In 1986 the friends had the idea to open a shop, Laimoun. Three years after opening their doors, Bergstrom walked in. And three years after that, the trio teamed up to open Liwan.



Rabih Kayrouz in Liwan's saharaabaya; a model from the designer's Spring 2019 show in Liwan x Maison Rabih Kayrouz slippers.

Photos: © Aline Diepois and Thomas Gizolme / Courtesy of Liwan; Yannis Vlamos / Indigital.tv



Among the team's goals is resisting trends in favor of long-wearing wardrobe staples. Another is to maintain handcraft traditions and support craftspeople. "One of the important challenges of the 21st century, I think, is how to keep and preserve this artisanal know-how and at the same time stay on the road," muses Haidar. Then there's the matter of style. Audi, who recently collaborated with Rabih Kayrouz, likes to think of her clothes as accessories. Notes Bergstrom, "They work with the rest of your wardrobe and add something no one else has; or you wear it in a way that makes it personal." Audi's starting point is traditional Eastern dress, which fits in with the modest trend in fashion. The industry is also feeling a lot of wanderlust these days—escapism was the mood of the Spring 2019 season—and that's a boon for Liwan. "The nomadic world that we live in today is the very inspiration that has carried Liwan this far," says Bergstrom. "We are in our 27th year, and the work we do is very complementary to the way the world is turning."