

We catch up with Emirati entrepreneur and fashion forward designer Sumayyah Al Suwaidi to see how this busy mum manages her time juggling her artistic passions, family life and boutique

When we speak to Sumayyah Al Suwaidi at her boutique, Grafika, we can't help but be impressed. This 31-year-old entrepreneur manages to juggle a variety of demanding roles including artist, curator, designer, business owner and mother – with an easy grace.

Her career has progressed in leaps and bounds from beginning as an artist in 2001 to curating art exhibitions, opening and running a multi-brand boutique to more recently designing her very own fashion and accessory line, SEEN.

When we ask Al Suwaidi exactly how she manages to have it all she answers thoughtfully, “I think it is somehow built in me. I'm always motivated to do something. It feels good to be someone who can create something new and achieve something. And there are so many different angles of myself – I wear different hats and each hat has its own responsibilities and time in my life.

“I don't like to limit myself, so when I ventured into fashion I said one day I would like to have not only a clothing line but also an accessory line, maybe some jewellery, maybe some bags. The more possibilities the better.

“At the same time I enjoy helping others, and supporting emerging artists and designers through platforms such as Grafika. I try to find new names who need the help and support to be out there and get noticed. I get a lot of satisfaction from feeling like I've helped.”

So how exactly does she manage to do it all? Al Suwaidi admits, “My inspiration comes from within. For me, my art is more of a diary. Instead of going home and writing in a journal, I'll go home and paint. That's how I exhale everything I've inhaled during the day.”

8am: This is the time Al Suwaidi usually gets up. After a quick breakfast, she gets changed and sees her children off to school. After that, she's ready to start the day.

10am to 12pm: At around this time Al Suwaidi starts to sort through her email inbox. She has three separate email accounts (for herself and her ventures) and makes sure she answers every single one.

“I have to juggle emails from both my boutique and my fashion line. Most of the emails will typically range from questions from designers already represented at the boutique, inquiries from designers who want to be part of Grafika, boutique owners who would like to stock SEEN in their stores and others are from the media who want to feature our products.”

1pm to 4pm: After managing her emails, Sumayyah stops to recharge her batteries and grab lunch. “I usually go out for lunch with my husband, by then the kids are still at school and I can sneak some time in to relax,” she says.

4pm to 5pm: Family is very important to Sumayyah and she looks forward to spending time with her five children. “By this time the children get back home from school. I get to find out what they did at school, make sure they ate lunch, change their clothes, pray and all the necessary stuff to get them settled.”

5pm to 7pm: After a quick family check-in Al Suwaidi is off to her boutique, Grafika. Now that they've recently relocated into a new space, she finds herself arranging the stock, following up with designers, her staff and any customers who've happened to leave a message or comment. After that, she busies herself taking photographs of new products in the store to update on her website.

7pm to 8pm: Boutique business done, she then heads off to visit the tailors for her fashion line and to follow up on her orders and supervise her designs.

“Every piece I design for SEEN is something I personally would want to wear. That's how I do it. If I can't see myself wearing it, I won't make it. Most of my pieces are items that I design for myself. Currently I have abayas, casual dresses and kaftans. Now I'm trying to expand into tunics and blouses.”

9.30pm: Work with the tailors over, Al Suwaidi finally heads back home. After spending some more time with the kids before bedtime, she then heads out to dinner with her husband.

“Typically we’ll go to our neighbourhood restaurant for a quick dinner and at the same time if I have to do some shopping for the house, there is a supermarket right next to it for me to pop in to afterwards. I usually always have to pick something because every day there is something missing in the kitchen, every day you have to buy something specially when you have five ma’shallah at home!”

11pm: By this time Al Suwaidi is back home and can’t help but check her emails again. After a quick once over, she unwinds after the long day by watching some of her favourite TV programmes.

1am: Finally ready to hit the sack, Al Suwaidi goes to sleep.

Last comments? “Remove the word fear from your dictionary and go ahead with what you desire or want to do. If you fail, you failed and you get up and do something new. If you succeeded then you did something right.”

Sawaiba Khan