



## Coffee Connection

### With designs on 'everyone'!

**M**RUNAL Khimji is an earnest, articulate, down-to-earth young lady, who takes her calling very seriously. "I have always been designing clothes and jewellery, right since I was in school," she says over the long, cool fruit juice she has opted for at Caffè Vergnano 1882.

In spite of the summer mid-morning heat, Mrunal looks poised and elegant in black trousers, an elaborately patterned gold and black front-buttoned tunic and a long interesting beaded necklace that she informs me is by 'Hrithika'.

She smiles often and her eyes light up as she speaks of her designer clothes and boutique which opened last October in Qurum, opposite the Earnst & Young building.

"We design clothes for just anybody — any shape, size, colour, nationality... We have a wide-ranging collection (including a bridal collection) and a clientele that includes people of all nationalities," she says.

Mrunal stresses that fashion is a service-oriented industry, so she offers personalised products and personal attention to her clients. Often, she end up advising her clients on what to wear, how to wear it and even what to avoid wearing. "I become their fashion consultant," she says, pointing out that sometimes, people are not able to tell their friend or relative that a certain thing does not suit her frame. "We sort of have to gently break it to them and then guide them towards something that

Mrunal does Indian clothes, j... wear... the entire range, she says. She also finds it a delight to deal with Omani clients. "They are liberal and open minded about what they are willing to wear," she says.

Mrunal says that her designs are inspired by everyday life and nature. In her boutique, everything that goes into making designer wear is done in-house — from cutting and stitching to fine tailoring and embroidery. "Only the fabric we source comes from outside," she says, though she rues that high import duties have a 'marginal effect on the price tag'.

But ultimately, it is quality that Mrunal offers her clients and something on which she is unwilling to compromise. "I wouldn't do a dress that I wouldn't be willing to have for myself," she says.

And so she sources only what she calls 'pure fabrics': cottons, crepe silks, georgettes. "I avoid polyester mixes and blends. Quality is important in all aspects of what we do: in the embroidery we do, the beads we source and use. These are not things you get off the shelf here," she points out.

Her designs have been on the ramp in Oman for a charity show, and she adds laughing that some kids recently borrowed her clothes for a fashion show at school.

Mrunal also has a workshop in Mumbai, India, managed by her mother and sister, and which supplies to various stores in the city.

Living in Oman for the past four years, Mrunal is comfortable designing with Omani traditions. Some of her designs have been featured in the Khimji Ramdas 2008 calendar, including a jalabiya in black and turquoise, which incorporates Dhofari cuts and embroidery from India to give a global look and style. "It is Asian fusion, inspired by India and Oman, and has the look of a peacock," she says of the design.

Mrunal's own personal favourites are: colours — white, black, blue, beige, and nowadays red; in fabrics, georgettes and cotton; in personal wear, pyjamas at home; and at work, "I absolutely love tunics, with trousers or denims."

There is, however, nothing to compare with the 'divine sari' — six yards of cloth that can be draped in so many ways and which lends grace to anybody, of any nationality, who wears it. We agree, Mrunal.

— Nasima H. Khan

