

Top Names in Brazilian Fashion Have Arab Blood

Contributed by Isaura Daniel
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They grew up listening to their parents and grandparents speaking in Arabic. At the table at home, sfihas, grape leaf rolls and tabbouleh were frequent dishes. And at the family parties the dance was the dabka, typical of the Arab culture.

They are sons and grandsons of Arabs who were born and raised in Brazil and reached the top of the ranking in national haute couture.

Amongst them are names like that of the stylist Fause Hatem, the businessman Alberto Hiar, owner of the Cavalera brand, and the fashion consultant Fernando Aidar. The three of them are Arab descendants. Also Amir Slama, who signs the brand Rosa Chá, is the son of an Iraqi.

Fause Hatem, in fact, as great part of the Arabs who works with making clothes in São Paulo, began his story on the 25 de Março street, in downtown São Paulo, where many Arab immigrants had their business shops.

His father had a jeans and sporting clothes factory in the region and gave Fause three machines to start his business. The stylist was only 17 years old at the time and didn't limit himself to local trade. He managed to obtain space in stores in the city and soon opened his own store of fine dresses in the Moema neighborhood.

As soon as he started showing his collections in fashion shows, in the beginning of the 1990s, Fause became nationally known. He was also the first Brazilian stylist invited to participate at the New York Fashion Week.

Fause is the son of Lebanese. His father, Edmond Naim, arrived in Brazil at the age of 18 and worked as a street peddler until he was able to set up his factory.

The stylist's mother Latif Hatem Naim, was born in Brazil, but is also Lebanese descendant. Fause states that elements of Arab culture and culinary, such as Arab bread, Syrian coffee and the 25 de Março street itself, are to this day part of his everyday life.

"I like tabbouleh a lot," says the stylist. Fause says he was always a fan of foods such as tabbouleh, kibbeh and sfiha, fatouche salad and curd. The kibbehs and sfihas, however, he eliminated from his menu ten years ago when he stopped eating red meat.

Fause doesn't speak Arabic, he only understands some words. "My parents spoke Arabic with their sons at home, but they had to stop because my brother was having difficulties in learning Portuguese," he tells.

Fause still hasn't been to Lebanon, but exports his collections to stores of the More & More chain in the Arab nation. Fause also has clients in the United States, Central America, Europe and is now starting to export to Japan.

Aidar

Fernando Aidar, stylist of Syrian-Lebanese origin, started his career in a very similar way as the Arabs used to start their businesses in Brazil, selling from door to door. Aidar was still a teenager, he was between 13 and 14 years old, when he decided to make clothes and sell them in school.

"I made the models, sent them to be sewn and sold it in school, and later in college," he tells. In this way, Aidar started a career that later yielded him important positions in the textile world.

He was products manager at the Riachuelo stores for three years and purchases manager at the Marisa chain for one year. The two stores are amongst the most popular clothes retail chains in Brazil.

Today Aidar has his own brand, Funny Girls, and is a consultant in the fashion industry. "I work a lot with factories of Arabs in Brás (neighborhood in São Paulo, with many clothes factories)," he states.

The stylist travels abroad eight times per year after the latest fashion tendencies and develops collections and products for materials, clothes and accessories factories. Aidar also gives lectures on fashion in Brazil and other countries in Latin America.

Aidar's parents, Maria Helena and José Aidar Filho, were born in Brazil. It was his great grandparents who came from the Arab world to America. The paternal great grandfather worked with linen exports in Brazil and the maternal great grandfather bought farms.

Aidar's father passed away about seven years ago, but his mother, who lives next to the stylist, continues spoiling her son with Arab food. "I like baked kibbeh and grape leaf rolls," he says.

Rosa Chá

Amir Slama, stylist and owner of Rosa Chá, the most famous beach fashion brand in Brazil, also has part of his history linked to the Arab world. His father, Iraqi, but of Jewish origin, came to Brazil when he was a little over 20 years old to work in the textile business.

"He worked as a trade representative on the 25 de Março street, in the Bom Retiro (neighborhood) and then set up a factory," he explains.

Before coming to Brazil, his father lived for a few years in Israel, where he met his wife. Amir recalls that his parents spoke in Hebrew between themselves, but that his paternal family spoke Arabic. "I recall my father speaking in Arabic with his circle of friends," he says.

Alberto Hiar, another Lebanese descendant, commands the brand Cavalera. Hiar was market seller and began his career in the textile world very early, still an adolescent.

He transformed Cavalera into one of the most popular brands in youngsters fashion in Brazil. Today, as well as businessman, Hiar is a state representative for São Paulo.

In Dubai

As of next week, between the 12th and 15th of September, Brazilian stylists and companies will participate, together with the Arab Brazilian Chamber of Commerce (CCAB), at the Motexha, fashion fair in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates.

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