

Iraqi Architect Puts Her Imprint on Brazil's Hottest Sandal

Contributed by Débora Rubin
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Melissa, the most popular sandal in Brazil, will be "speaking" Arabic once again. In 2005, Egyptian designer Karim Rashid came to Brazil to launch his version of the shoe. Now, it is the turn of 57-year-old Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid. The Melissa + Zaha Hadid sandal is the brand's great launch for summer 2009.

Full of curves and straps, the small sandal will only arrive in Brazil in September. A gigantic version, though, can already be seen at Galeria Melissa, in the city of São Paulo. Zaha is still working on the color palette of the sandal that will bear her name. The price, however, is already set: 199.90 reais (US\$ 125).

According to Melissa, the architect was inspired by the fluid motion that accompanies the curves of the body. "The fluidity of our design matched Melissa's plastic technology perfectly, in which parts are injected without patching or sewing," said the architect.

Zaha has designed all sorts of things - bridges, buildings, sports centers and settings for large events. This, however, was her first time creating a shoe. For her, it was a means to express her ideas in a different manner.

Zaha was born in Baghdad in 1950. She studied mathematics at the American University of Beirut, and, later on, graduated in architecture at the Architectural Association School of Architecture, in London, where she currently has her firm.

Regarded as a "deconstructivist," Zaha is also labeled as "organic," "erotic," "modern," "optimistic" and "brave" - for not fearing to create something completely new and unexpected. She has worked all over the world. She has won countless awards, even for projects that have not even left the plant yet. Some such projects, such as the Peak Club, in Hong Kong, developed in 1983, are objects of study until this day.

In 2004, Zaha won the Pritzker - the world's leading architecture award - for her body of work. Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer was another of the prize's winners. Zaha claims to be a big fan of Niemeyer. She has also earned the Order of the British Empire. Her most recent project is the London Aquatics center, with capacity for 20,000 people, which should be concluded in time for the 2012 Olympic Games.

In the Arab world, she designed several works, such as the Sheikh Zayed Bridge, created in 1997. Also in the United Arab Emirates, Zaha has two super-mega projects underway. One is a cultural center, also in Abu Dhabi, shaped after sea waves.

The building will be part of a cultural tourism hub that should include a branch of the Louvre Museum. For Dubai, Zaha designed the Dancing Towers, three buildings that are going to be built at the Business Bay.

Those who go to Galeria Melissa until July 26, Saturday, will be able to view an exhibition featuring the architect. Photos, videos, scale models, books and, of course, the gigantic version of the Melissa sandal, give a clue as to why Zaha is so hyped all over the world.

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