

# Pretty POWERFUL

*The inspirational women of the Middle East putting their passion in to practice.*

By Natascha Hawke & Laura Collacott Photography by Danny Daniel

## Music Katie Kittermaster 12, Singer

**K**atie Kittermaster is just 12 years old, but she's already carving out a career for herself in the cutthroat world of music. She has been approached by UK television show 'Britain's Got Talent' to perform on national TV, a platform which has launched so many professional careers, including that of her idols, One Direction. "Singing a duet with One Direction would be the ultimate for me!" she says. "I love them so much."

Her talent was noticed early in a modest setting. "I was picked out by my kindergarten teacher to sing a solo in my nativity play. I was playing an angel. My Mum and Dad didn't know that I was going to sing - it made them very emotional as I was just three."

Her grandfather loved singing and "always encouraged me". Sadly he died three years ago, but not before thoughtful Katie had recorded a song for him. "It made me sad as I was not there to say goodbye, but it was played at his funeral."

Her progress has been swift, despite her young age. "When I first started singing on stage I would look down and be rather

awkward. I found being tall really difficult and would hunch my shoulders. I try to be proud of my height now. Actually I am now taller than my Mum - I kind of like that!"

She finds promoting herself - a necessary part of the job - uncomfortable. "I felt a bit strange about doing that," she says of posting her first video on YouTube. "I get a little embarrassed but I know that if I want to be successful, which I do, I have to try everything. I'm still amazed when people watch me and post nice comments. I am a nobody who just wants to make it!"

At the same time, she knows that self-belief is vital. "When I have done well it has made me realise that anything is possible if you really want it. I often lie on my bed and visualise my life in the future."

To be successful, "to engage the audience and be believed, you need to feel the music and want to sing."

"I believe that with hard work passion and a sprinkling of good fortune that you can achieve your dream."

[www.youtube.be/uogSsEwwCsg](http://www.youtube.be/uogSsEwwCsg)



## Fashion Christina Karachaliou

35, Managing Director of O' My Glamour!

**C**hristina Karachaliou is confident, sassy and glamorous. She has to be; it's her job as founder of O' My Glamour!, a lifestyle consultancy offering fashion styling, make-up and shopping services to busy women in the UAE. "I prefer describing what I do as: 'Giving the Gift of Glamour to women!'" she says.

"Like most girls, when I was little, I loved putting on my mum's lipstick, wearing her jewellery and trying to pose gracefully in her high heels in front of the bedroom mirror."

"Then, I started growing up; it's that stage in your life when it's no longer cute to answer 'Princess' every time someone asks you: 'What do you want to be?'"

Dreams of being a princess were fractured by "very difficult" teenage years "both physically and emotionally. I suffered from very bad acne, I wore braces, was overweight and had the reputation of being my class 'geek'." I was the anti-poster child. "Although it sounds silly now, at the time I felt as if my life had no meaning."

She moved to London and took a degree in psychology, a subject that fascinated her because of "how it affected people's behaviour and lives". After qualifying she went on to work in a number of challenging roles, helping abused women and mental

health patients.

"In the space of 3 years, I went from a dress size 10 UK to a size 22... but the worst part was that I was unhappy as a person. I had been focusing all my time and energy to empowering other people that I neglected my own wants and needs. I had lost myself."

Taking herself in hand, she started taking care of her eating habits and well-being, "taking time to do the things I loved". By the time she moved to Dubai in 2007, she was down to a UK size 14 and felt "more connected with myself than I had ever been".

Channeling that positivity into a vocation was an easy step. "I combine my academic background with my innate love for people" and beautiful things.

"It is not just about appearances. My job as a female and a professional is to empower women of all age groups and social statuses to recognise their potential and educate them to make the right choices: from skincare to clothing while embracing their individuality."

[www.omyglamour.com](http://www.omyglamour.com)



## Music Simone Heng

28, Presenter on 104.4 Virgin Radio

Simone Heng is one of the UAE's best-loved radio presenters, regularly appearing on Personality of the Year award and best-dressed lists. Her talent for presenting comes naturally. "I remember pretending to present TV shows in my parent's bedroom like many kids, hairbrush in hand," she says. "I didn't realise how naturally capable I was with speaking impromptu and at length until I started debating in high school. I could hold the attention of the room and could remember long facts that others couldn't."

Perseverance led her to a career in radio, working as an unpaid copywriting intern and on community TV in her native Perth while trying to catch her big break. That came when she took a chance on an opportunity in Southeast Asia and started presenting TV shows in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. Four years into her TV career, the radio stations discovered her.

"I get paid to talk to people, engage them, charm them – these are things I'd do for free!"

Radio is an "opportunity to influence people in a positive way. I talk them through problems or bring attention to a charity which is overlooked. I love that I can set an example to young girls."

The antisocial hours and out-of-work commitments for events mean it's not always easy. "Some days it's hard to get out of bed, some nights it's hard to put a PR smiley face on but once I am on air manning the panel, once I am speaking to new people or

shooting something I feel completely at ease."

Remarkably she still finds time for other projects, the latest being a fashion and lifestyle blog that shows young women how to look good on a budget. Her creativity was inadvertently cultivated by her parents: "I had very strict parents, they didn't let us out much so I used to sew dolls clothes, draw and do a lot of craft."

Ambitious and driven, her success "makes me feel valued. It's bad I know, we shouldn't measure our self worth by our achievements but I would be lying if I didn't say I was conditioned this way."

It hasn't gone to her head. "It's nice to be important but it's more important to be nice," she says with firm belief.

It would be great if other young women could "achieve success on their own terms and to taste how gratifying it is", "to be financially independent from their fathers, brothers and husbands".

But above all, it's time spent with loved ones that matters most. "Now that I am getting closer to 30, I see the value in spending time with amazing friends, family and having a holiday or a day off. I finally feel that you only get one shot at life and your career cannot be all you live for."

[www.simoneheng.com](http://www.simoneheng.com)



## Beauty Maria Dowling

45, Owner & Creative Director of the Maria Dowling hair salon

Maria Dowling, founder of the eponymous hair salon, didn't want to be a hairdresser. "I wanted to join the police force. Maybe I'd watched too many episodes of Prime Suspect – or perhaps, Cagney and Lacey!" she says. "Being too young to apply, my parents suggested that I wait out the year until I came of age to submit my application, suggesting that I apply for a (temporary) junior position at the local hairdressing salon."

The police dream fell away, replaced by a new fervor: "Once I started squeezing the tubes and mixing away, I felt like a magician. I can still remember how empowering it felt to mix colour, apply it and watch it transform not only the colour of the hair but the way a woman could feel so much more positive about her appearance, herself."

Working her way up through the ranks of hairdressing, she showed a flair for snappy cuts and colour, one that has been recognised in hairdressing bible 'Hairdressers Journal'. When she moved to Dubai it was time to go

it alone, a moment she remembers with tremulous pride. "All first time door openings are such pivotal moments; the key to your first car, the key to your first home...it changes who you are."

It takes strong leadership and the right attitude to make a strong creative boss. "When you work with a team and you are directional – you need to be passionate. It's a contagious quality."

She strives to constantly improve: "I always think that everything good can be even more wonderful."

The salon has now been open for ten years, established as one of the city's ultimate hair dressing addresses. It takes "happiness, honesty, integrity" to keep it thriving, not to mention "our wonderful clients on whom we all depend for our livelihood. And last but not least, a cup of hot water with freshly squeezed lemon, every single morning."

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## Foodie Tala Soubra

25, Businesswoman, Food Blogger & budding Pâtissier

**F**ood brings people together, whether it's for breakfast or dinner, a connection is made. People talk, laugh, smile and enjoy the moment. That's the rationale behind starting up premier food blog 'Fork it Over'.

Tala Soubra, the brains behind the operation, is dedicated to finding restaurants that deliver on food, taste, ambience and value-for-money alongside recipes which combine unique ingredients with ease and happiness.

"I am not making money of Fork It Over Dubai," says upstanding Tala, "because I don't believe in advertising on my blog. If a restaurant advertises and my reader sees that I have reviewed that restaurant they may sense a conflict of interest. Trust of my readers is something I value most."

"My full time job is corporate banking (for now) but I have big plans for the future." These include dreams of opening "my own French patisserie in Dubai estimated to open in the first quarter of 2014," something she discovered a passion for whilst at chef school in Paris one summer.

She is also keen to put pen to paper and combine her "love of food photography and recipes" by writing and photographing her "very own cookbook".

She has already completed cooking courses to set her on the right track and is emerging as one of the UAE's ultimate food bloggers. Proof that perhaps you can have your cake and eat it too.

[www.forkitoverdubai.com](http://www.forkitoverdubai.com)



## Fashion Hanniya Ali

22, Graduate Gemologist ar Jewellery Designer

**M**y earliest memory is as a young child, running across the beach with my sister Hanna," says jewellery designer Hanniya Aliraza (pictured far right). "We would spend hours searching for unusual stones and beautiful shells, and collect them to make jewellery. The entire process of finding the stones and later transforming them into wearable art was an absolute joy."

Fast forward fifteen years and the pair are still making jewellery, only now they've gone professional.

"My creativity, coupled with my love for mathematics, convinced me early on that jewellery was undoubtedly the field I wanted to build a career in," says Hanniya. She studied gemology at the Gemological Institute of America (GIA) to learn more about the science behind sparklers and now combines her newfound knowledge and natural creativity in the production of exquisite pieces. She and her sister, also a gemologist, are currently working on their own line of jewellery - 'Iyana'.

It's a family business. Her brother is the only person she truly trusts to give frank opinions. He is "my best go-to person for objective criticism" she says.

But if she draws strength from the support of her family, her motivation all comes from within. "Everything I do in life

is driven by a deep rooted passion," she says, "and jewellery designing for me is no different. When you have passion about what you do, it doesn't feel like 'work'."

It should start with a dream. "To me, it's the most important thing in life, because only when you dream do you work towards making that dream a reality."

Far from resting on her laurels, success is only adding fuel to her fire. "Success has boosted my self-confidence. It has also reinforced to me that I am headed in the right direction, which constantly motivates me to work harder."

Her advice? "Don't let success get to your head and failure to your heart."



## Art & Lifestyle Abeer Seikaly

33, Architect, artist and designer

**A**rchitect, artist and designer Abeer Seikaly is constantly finding inspiration for her work all around her. She remembers watching her grandmother work on intricate aubusson embroidery, her mother creating elaborate flower arrangements from food and seeing the architectural model for the family home in Amman. "It was like my dream dollhouse. It inspired me to study architecture."

Her passion for creativity also extends to art and design. Only last month she was chosen by judge Matthew Williamson as winner of the Rug Co. competition to design a wall hanging. "For me, the process of creating is equivalent to being in a state of bliss," she says. "There is always a pleasure in making things, through creating objects. Beauty is a manifestation of happiness."

Less so for some unwitting members of her family. She recalls "waiting for my aunt to fall asleep, opening a chest in her room containing her drawings and scribbling all over them with green colored pens and pencils. It was my first attempt at drawing. She woke up to a scene of her beautiful drawings being vandalized. I remember

seeing her cry endlessly." Mortified though she may have been, years later the kind-hearted aunt gave Abeer the drawings that she saved.

Her family played a pivotal role in her development for "extraordinarily graceful environments" they provided her, allowing her to lap up artistic influences from a young age. "Observing their dedication and perseverance has confirmed and enhanced my notion of the importance of beauty and how it brings the feeling of happiness from within us," she says.

Interestingly, music is a key part of the process too. It "takes the mind to a level where it stirs the imagination" she says. "I find in some way, music is always present in my projects. As Nietzsche said: 'Without music, life would be an error.'"

Her outlook explains the sheer pleasure that Abeer derives from her work, even if she is coy about her success. "If it is a job it is an obligation," she muses. "My work is to continuously recreate and reinvent new definitions and ideas that enhance our surroundings. It is my enjoyment; it's like going to the beach."



## Art Lan Stanley Artist

**T**here's a connection between the traditional cultures of Vietnam and the Middle East," says Lan who moved here from her native Vietnam three years ago. "They have a similar way of dressing with their traditional clothing. They both live and socialize in groups, men with men and women with women."

It's a theme that she's been exploring in beautiful paintings and etchings ever since.

Her creativity is well-established: "I've always loved making paintings, drawings," she says, describing how her mother took her to her first art classes as a young girl and introduced her to two of Vietnam's greatest artists. She was the first female artist to have a solo show in Hanoi since the war ended in 1975, exhibiting a selection of paintings

contrasting women in traditional clothes, with nudes.

I remember "when I sold my first art work when I was fresh out of college" she says. "An overseas visitor bought it. I was so happy to know there was someone who shared the same feeling about my creation. That was more important than the money itself."

There's more to life than possessions and money. "Material things won't make it happen," she says. Happiness is what counts. "Be true to what you believe in and never stop being a better person for yourself and others."

To fuel creativity, "get out of your comfort zone and keep discovering to create new and better work."

[www.lan-art.com](http://www.lan-art.com)



## Foodie Dana Jallad

42, Founder of Hey Sugar bakery

**T**he owner of the region's most successful bakery, Hey Sugar's Jordanian-Lebanese founder Dana Jallad is a prime example of putting one's passion in to practice and making it a success. "I have always loved sweets. I was always the kid who couldn't wait to cut the birthday cake, so it's no surprise that I chose this field", she says. She remembers the first day she opened the shop doors to a queue of people lining up outside. "That was a great feeling," she says.

The fun lies in using her creativity. "It's fun to work on new products, new names and new ideas. I started with only eight cupcake flavours. Today we have over thirty."

"But having a passion and putting it into practice are two totally different things. This business requires constant supervision so we have to be on top of it at all times."

Growing from one bakeshop in Jumeirah's Village Mall to 13 outlets across the region from Al Ain to Abu Dhabi, Dana's "idea to pass time has truly emerged

into a full-fledged business", but she says whilst the success is rewarding, the real joy comes from "what the business offers back to the community as a whole". The company is committed to regular charity drives focus on women empowerment, children's and cancer charities.

It won't stop there. Dana plans to open stores in every major capital around the world, constantly looking to the next horizon.

"I love Hey Sugar; it's my passion, and it's my focus. I love the thrill of being an entrepreneur. I know it sounds cliché but I believe that if you work hard, "You can have your cake and eat it too."

**Hey Sugar can be found in Village Mall, Mirdif City Centre and Khalidiyah Mall in Abu Dhabi**



## Music Clarita de Quiroz

28, Model, Singer & Pianist.

**C**larita de Quiroz is among Dubai's hottest musical property. Despite only taking music up as a full time career in 2010, she's gone from strength to strength. From winning the Young Musician of the Year award in 2008 to last year supporting Elton John in Abu Dhabi, a moment that she says "means the world to me".

Beautiful as well as talented, she currently has the number one selling album in the UAE showcasing her talents as a classically trained pianist, percussionist and vocalist.

"I've always wanted to be a musician," she explains. "I've been playing piano since I was 4 years old, and I guess the love began to grow as my skills did."

Her teachers were the first to notice and nurture her talent. "The penny dropped when I was in high school, around the age of 14, and my music teachers really told me to pursue my music career. They told me I

had something different; that's when I started to really believe in myself." Now basking in the glory of success, she says that "all those years, hours, sweat, tears, emotion, sacrifice have all paid off".

"If you believe you can, you can." Self-belief combined with raw talent and passion have been a powerful combination. "Passion is everything, especially in the arts industry, as it's our form of expression. I give 200% in every performance and pretty much put my heart and soul out there when I sing."

She is delighted that her life has found its natural course. Long may it continue, she says. "Having my dream job keeps me pretty happy on a daily basis. I see myself as a musician, even if I am 80 years old, I will always have music around me."

The official website of **Clarita De Quiroz** [www.claritadequiroz.com](http://www.claritadequiroz.com)



## Beauty Aseya Nasib

Freelance makeup artist & beauty writer

**F**reelance makeup artist and beauty blogger, Aseya Nasib turned her passion for all things beauty related in to a blog and subsequently a career. Working as a freelance makeup artist, Aseya launched *Pretty In The Desert* as a platform to practice her beauty writing and as a creative outlet against her day job working on fashion and advertising shoots. "I'm a girlie girl, so I love talking about products and techniques."

As it has gained popularity (she's now had over 200,000 views), so has the demand for her knowledge and it wasn't long before she was contributing to a local magazine, writing and compiling the beauty pages. "I've always wanted to work for a magazine and being able to put my passion down on paper feels like a really great achievement, especially knowing people are reading it."

Loaded with beauty anecdotes and professional tips, the blog has a distinctive

voice that is contagiously cute and has made her hugely popular with the region's young beauty addicted generation. Sharing her personality packed opinions with refreshing honesty.

She also enjoys the feel good factor that her job provides. "I love being able to make women look gorgeous and feel confident." Something she hopes she will eventually turn in to a physical, branded business in the shape of a salon and beauty line. "I'd love to open my own salon and have my own range of products - so watch this space."

In the meantime, she'll continue her job keeping us all looking pretty.

[www.prettyninthedesert.com](http://www.prettyninthedesert.com)



## Lifestyle Zeina Abdalla

29, Founder and Managing Director of Fishfayce digital photobooth solution

**T**wo years ago Zeina Abdalla was working for one of the region's largest PR firms until one day she and her husband decided to start Fishfayce, a photobooth and photo solutions service with bases in Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE.

"My husband and I really wanted to have a photobooth concept at our wedding back in 2010, but weren't able to find anything in the market that was suitable," she says. "We experimented for a while and consulted our geeky friends to find just the right technology. Let me tell you, it was a hit at the wedding! Our guests must have taken over 1500 photos!"

So many people asked them where they got the sideshow from that they decided there and then that it was a business venture waiting to happen.

She "never tires of seeing the joy on the faces" or the "bemused smiles on the faces of the hosts, knowing they will walk away with a treasure of funny and memorable moments".

They put "a lot on the line" to start their business up, but they come from a

line of business-minded people. Good enterprises should come from faith in one good idea: "This quote says it perfectly. We are always focused on what won't work and our fears that we forget about the positives. 'Forget about all the reasons why something may not work. You only need to find one good reason why it will.'"

"Starting a business is like watching a baby grow. It's your creation and its future is dependent on the work you put into it," but when "you're on top of things, you're programmed towards achievement. It's incentive. When you see results, you work harder."

Expansion is set to continue into new countries and concepts in the near future. Why not? Asks Zeina. "I feel empowered and motivated."

[www.fishfayce.com](http://www.fishfayce.com)



# *Lifestyle* *Lakshmi Sukumaran*

*34, Founder La Vela Candles*

**L**ike many of the companies represented here, La Vela Candles has been going for two years. Founder Lakshmi Sukumaran moved from Melbourne to Dubai five years ago and explored her fascination with how candles are made, what makes some better than others. There weren't, she decided, enough luxury, long-lasting candles on the market.

Scents are evocative, emotional. "My first fragrance memory is of my parents' backyard growing up in South Africa," she says; "they had fig, grape, lemon and passion fruit trees. Different seasons, different scents."

She still draws inspiration for her fragrances from life around her – "holidays, hobbies, food. The Middle East has such a

strong spirit of both the traditional and modern. I love working with intense fragrances that are more of the region like Frankincense, Myrrh, Oud, Bakhoor, Rose and then mixing it up with more light floral or fruity fragrances – the combinations are amazing!"

As in scent, balance is the most important goal to achieve. "Success to me also means creating and maintaining a balance in my life. It's important to work hard, accomplish your goals and also spend time with my friends and family."

**La Vela Candles can be found at O'de Rose, O Concept and Maison Sez**

