

VILLA MODA LAUNCHES MARCEL WANDERS-DESIGNED BAHRAIN STORE

Villa Moda is about to launch its seventh luxury fashion emporium, a 1050 m² space in a new ultra luxury shopping mall, the Moda Mall in Bahrain. Villa Moda Bahrain will feature staggeringly innovative and fantastical designs by Dutch design maverick Marcel Wanders. Situated in a prime central location with views over the sea, the store will sit alongside luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton, Hermes, Bottega Veneta, Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci and Fendi.

“I was looking for someone who’d never designed a real fashion store before,” explains Sheikh Majed Al-Sabah, Villa Moda’s founder, of his decision to commission Wanders, whom he discovered through his furniture designs. While Wanders is acclaimed for his work with manufacturers such as Droog Design, B&B Italia, Bisazza and Cappellini, Villa Moda Bahrain will be the first time he has worked on a luxury concept store.

The commission is in keeping with Al-Sabah’s adventurous spirit and willingness to take risks. The brief was simple; to be inspired by the chaos of the souk within a luxury fashion context. Al-Sabah took Wanders on a tour of the Middle East, exploring souks and traditional retail concepts. Wanders’ resulting designs were created under the theme of the ‘International Souk’.

“We wanted to create a shop which is really surprising,” Wanders explains; “every time you go there you discover something new.” Wanders designed the store as if it were a small city – a lot of the elements have an architectural feel as customers move from one place to another. Local motifs and traditions are combined with Wanders’ joyful, fantastical aesthetic to develop an environment with an “Alice-in-Wanders-land” appeal, as he jokingly puts it. “We are trying to do work which takes you to new places, which makes you see the world in a new way.”

The façade is covered in giant pearl-like spheres, a reference to Bahrain's heritage as the pearl stock market of the Middle East. Customers enter a long, narrow corridor that opens into a dramatic, high-ceilinged space with giant patterns in black and white on custom carpeting and overscale wallpaper. "We worked with craftsmen from the region and around the world," Wanders adds, "but confused them with our way of looking at these crafts; we used their expertise but asked them to do things they wouldn't normally do." A striking example is a giant sculptural flower pattern made in plaster covering the wall behind the cash desk. Other specially designed features include walls with Bisazza mosaics and custom-made carpets created in Germany.

Villa Moda Bahrain will offer a cutting edge mix of innovative luxury brands which have little or no representation in the Middle East, such as Anya Hindmarch, Martin Margiela, Ossie Clark, rue du Mail, Nina Ricci, Christopher Kane, Comme des Garçons and Junya Watanabe. Standalone stores for brands such as Marni and Dries van Noten will sit among womens' and mens' multibrand areas, evening wear, young fashion, sunglasses, perfumes, shoes and jewellery. With Bahrain's status as a hub for banking institutions, the mens' offer will emphasise suiting for the executive market.

"It's a fun playground for shoppers", Al-Sabah explains, describing the store as a, "luxury souk where customers can find a £20 t-shirt or a £20,000 evening dress." With customers being able to pick up treasures as diverse as a Karim Rashid vase, an Assouline book, a pair of jeans from Seven or a dress from Dries van Noten, Villa Moda Bahrain will offer a treasure trove of discoveries in a retail environment that is truly unforgettable.