

DINA KAMAL

THINKING BOX OUTSIDE THE



Traditional is not a word that crosses your mind when you see Dina Kamal's designs. It is absolutely contemporary – take a close look at her Flat Plate and Flower series or her Tube and Hob (Love) series, and you'll see the principles of proportion and architecture at play. By **SMITHA SADANANDAN**

All her work is modern in style, architectural in perspective, and deceptively simple. "I am a trained and practising architect, who happened to get into jewellery making," says the Beirut-based designer. Everything falls into place.

The names of her jewellery are pretty straightforward – Flat Plate, Flat Coin, Tube, Flat Wire, Pearl, Cross and ID Gourmante – as are her design aesthetics that draw upon similar principles in architecture: research, process and details.

Dina hinges her designs on a set of core elements. "Whether it is a renovation project or a private jewellery commission, the process is very sacred to me. I spend a lot of time doing research. It inspires me and I get my ideas for jewellery from my research," she says.

One such random research on vintage jewellery led to her discovery of signet rings. She talks about how pharaohs and the nobility wore these rings for obvious reasons – to show off their power and status. The trend died and was revived when the mafia, dandies and the pimps took a liking to these accessories. A few minutes into the conversation and you realise Dina is a font of knowledge.

Women wore signet rings in the 1920s, she continues. When they discarded the corsets, took to comfortable clothing and became assertive, these rings became an extension of their personality. "Back then, women also wore cocktail rings or statement pieces on their little fingers," says Dina. Signet rings, by then,

ID cord tube necklace in gold set with diamonds.



were no longer a family seal or status symbol. Traditionally worn on the pinkie (little) finger, these rings – later popularised by rappers and hip-hop singers – took the ‘cool’ quotient up by several notches.

“I then did a small collection, based on the shape of signet rings, and worked on the proportions to perfect my idea,” explains Dina. “Dover Street Market picked it up immediately. I adore Dover Street Market and thought – they like it; now I need to take this seriously.” When Dina first launched her pinkie rings in the market, they were neither trendy nor fashionable. “Now, it is cool,” she says, smiling.

Five colour variations, five textures are the trademark of her jewels. Varied proportions of the rings ensure they fit snugly over the finger. Something that strikes you most is the beige colour tone of Dina’s jewellery. “I discovered something about the beige colour while I was teaching myself about gold ... 18-karat gold is typically used for good jewellery, and you’d have 75% gold and 25% alloy. The alloy without copper gives you a beige shade; more copper makes it pink,” she explains. “I like beige. It is subtle and beautiful.” She uses yellow tones sparingly and leans more towards her favourite beige, along with pink, white and black. To accentuate the pieces, Dina uses diamonds in shades of white, brown, black, champagne, besides sapphires in soft pink hues and enamels.

As Dina talks animatedly, her signature Loupe necklace gently sways around her neck. It looks like a magnifying lens turned into a pendant. Functional jewellery? “Yes. It has a reading lens. I made one when I found I could no longer easily read my bills or look up my phone and read the messages. I didn’t want to switch glasses all the time and so made the Loupe necklace,” she says. The diamond-accented Loupe necklaces do look fancy.

Dina also works a lot on private commissions as she finds the process fascinating. “I like commissions; they bring along their own stories. Some time back, a client wanted me to do a piece of Georgian jewellery. As usual, I did some research and that’s how my Flower series came about later. I like to bring up an old idea and make something new,” says Dina, who recently released her Open ring series.

Five years since she launched her design practice DKO1 in 2010 and branched out into jewellery, the crafting process for Dina is much the same. “It is still sacred.” The wrap-around rope bracelet with an ingenious clip-on attachment, the stackable pinkie rings and elegant cufflinks reflect her unmistakable aesthetics – a result of arduous hours of research and work, no doubt. The creation, explains Dina, involves a lot of layers. “I work on the process and repeat many prototypes until I am finally happy. Usually, ideation to crafting the final piece takes me about six months,” says Dina, whose creative visions, for both men and women, are meticulously crafted by a Beirut atelier.

Having to wear hairclips, she is now feeling inspired enough to create some in gold. “I really want to do hairclips. Every year, I invest in making new pieces, and if I had the budget, I’d do 10 new things each year,” says Dina with a chuckle. She adds that she’d like to expand her business. “I am in no rush; besides it is good to grow slowly. I am, however, looking at investors; someone who understands the brand and my work,” she adds.

Until she designs those hairclips, which we know we’d love to wear, we are happy to stack up on the stylish pinkie rings. ■

Loupe pendant in gold accented with diamonds.



1. Flat plate pinkie gold ring set with diamonds. **2.** Inspired by Georgian jewellery, this gold signet ring is decorated with black enamel and pearls. **3.** Flat white and yellow gold pinkie gold rings. **4.** Flat coin pinkie ring set with diamonds. **5.** Flat plate diamond cufflinks in beige gold with brushed finish.