

LOOK SMART, LIVE SMARTER

EMIRATES MAN



Sheikh Dr Majid Al Qassimi

THE SUMMER ESCAPE ISSUE

The Signature

Founded by three friends, Signature Yashmagh aims to highlight the true grace of Emirati menswear

Signature Yashmagh is the brand aiming to redefine the perception of Emirati menswear in the region. Founded by three friends in 2019, Ahmad Al Hashemi, Meeshal Al Marzouqi and Khalid Belhoul, the trio banded together with a passion to showcase authentic Emirati culture. "With our Emirati background, we have been very dedicated to showcasing the authentic Emirati culture, the real grace of Emirati menswear and their fashion sense," the founders explain. With the name Signature Yashmagh translating to the 'Signature of An Arab Man', the three founders have developed the brand exponentially in just two years. What initially started as an Instagram shop, has led to a standalone store in The Dubai Mall, as well as Signature Yashmagh being sold with other retailers across the GCC.

Emirates Man sat down with Al Hashemi, Al Marzouqi and Belhoul to discover the real story behind the brand and how the trio are redefining perceptions in the world of Emirati men's fashion.

Can you talk us through your careers? We are the three founders of Signature Yashmagh; Ahmad Al Hashemi, Meeshal Al Marzouqi & Khalid Belhoul, we have been friends since college and our passion for entrepreneurship brought us together. However, we have different career backgrounds. Ahmad is in the communication sector with the government, Khalid is into the energy industry also with the government while Meeshal is an engineer. We've worked towards our individual passions and education, and furthered ourselves to pursue these careers. We truly feel that the country fosters this love for growth and excellence in every individual, the means to work towards and achieve several goals.

Throughout college, we would be seen as active members of our institutions – be it as student council members or delegating innovative activities; we ensured that there was a drive and a goal to work towards. And later, despite choosing different career fields, we decided to put together our career skills, individual and shared experience along with our passions to grow our brand.

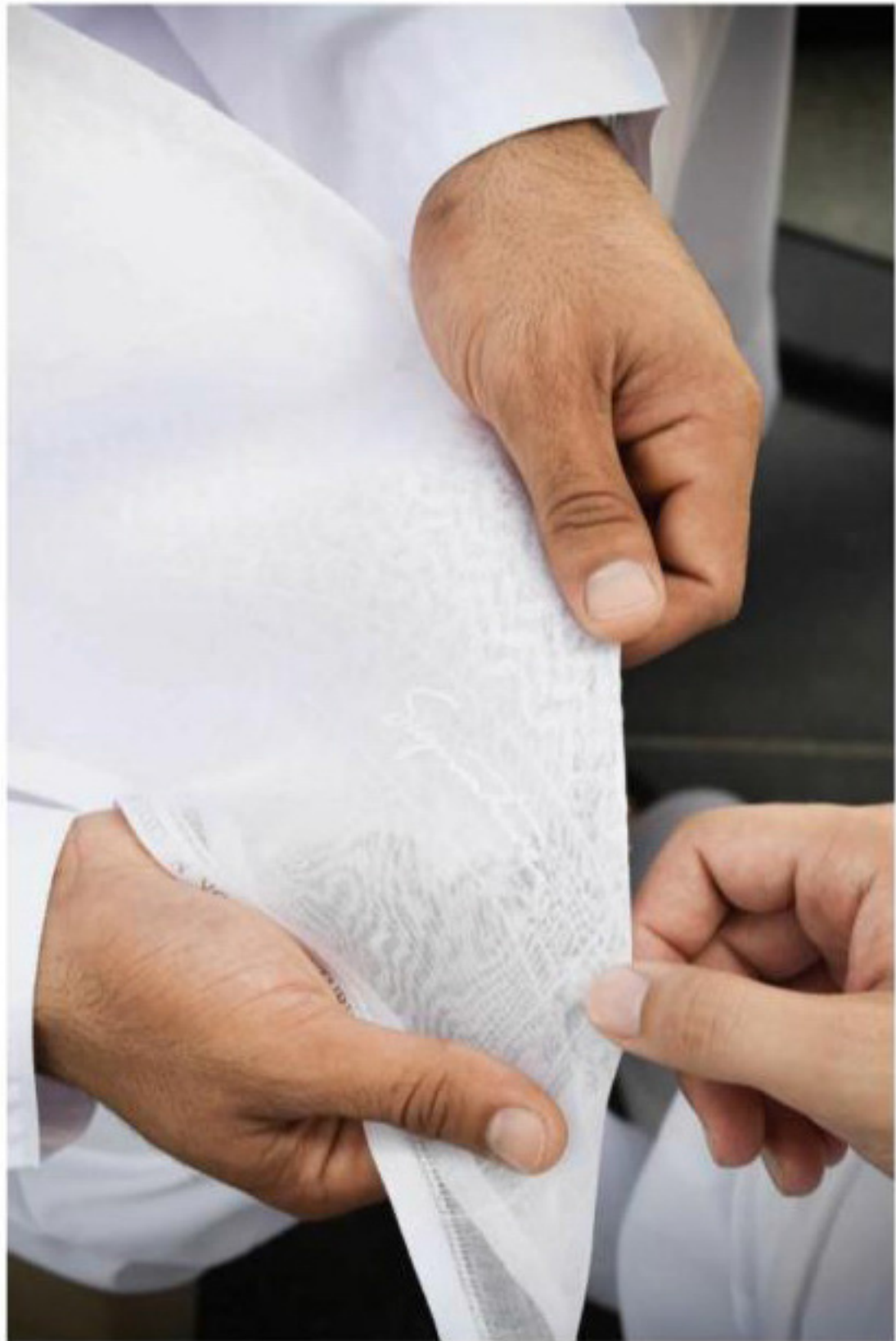
What inspired you to start your own fashion brand to showcase Emirati menswear? When we thought about entrepreneurship and how we wanted to start up our brand, we wanted a cause, a product or a story that we were passionate about, something that drove us to be better every day. This is how Signature Yashmagh was founded. With our Emirati background, we have been very dedicated to showcasing the authentic Emirati culture, the real grace of Emirati menswear and their fashion sense. Throughout the Arab world, many people wear the shemag or the headgear but the Emirati way is unique in its own way. Understanding this diversity has led to many misinterpretations about the Emirati way and style. When we decided to start our brand, we knew we wanted to come together and change that.

WORDS: OLIVIA MORRIS

Our brand Signature Yashmagh translates to the 'Signature of An Arab Man' because shemag or yashmagh is the headgear worn by all Emirati men, and our main vision was to bring focus onto the real Emirati style of wearing our iconic head gear. To instill the meaning, the understanding of the culture, to highlight the beauty of our simplicity - Signature Yashmagh is just that: classic, minimalist, graceful and of the utmost quality. How has your brand evolved since it launched? Our brand was established in 2019 and was solely an Instagram-based set up and sale point. During these two years, the brand has done commendably; sales have soared. We've had over 3500 orders in the first year of our brand being active and over 3000 loyal customers! This is an amazing progress rate for new business owners, considering also the advent of the pandemic.

As we all know, last year Covid hit and most of the businesses had to adapt to being more virtual. However, because we were new and were operating virtually already, this did not impact our business activities. Rather we had an advantage as we had perfected our operations, our processes, platforms and delivery systems. Soon after when our customers wanted a more physical approach, a shop to visit and browse products, we opened our first branch in Dubai Mall and were selling with other retailers across the GCC so we would say our brand has evolved tremendously & positively and we can't wait to see what the future holds for our brand.

Can you talk us through what it's been like working together over the last couple of years? Throughout these years, we have discovered new insights about the business that allowed us to come up with ways we can continue to create unique products/offers. It has just been years of learning more about the business world and each other, we have been able to gain new experiences from the different backgrounds we come from and also diverse cultural



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insights while working with our customers from all over. They have helped evolve our business and us too.

As we said earlier, we all come from different educational backgrounds but our knowledge from these fields has helped us create our brand as well as grow together. The relationship that started off as us being friends has turned us into being like brothers. We look forward to bringing new changes into our business and showcasing the brotherhood of the Emirati culture.

What does Signature Yashmagh represent? Signature Yashmagh represents our identity as Emirati men, it is our way of bringing modern minimalism to the authentic look of the yashmagh. We use only the best-sourced fabrics with efficient processes to ensure our touch of quality within every product. It represents our nation as a country that is innovative, productive, fearless and we are so proud of all our achievements that we have been blessed with since we started two years ago. We are beyond grateful to see all that we have achieved in our set of practices, ethics, operations, productions and in our rules. We want to represent all that an Emirati man is and all that our nation continues to achieve through our brand Signature Yashmagh.

What sets Signature Yashmagh apart from other brands? What sets us apart from other brands is our focus on the quality of our product and our mission to shine light on the authentic Emirati style of men's fashion. The cotton we use is of the finest quality and woven to perfection to create a smooth texture that facilitates comfort, breathability for our customers. We are so involved in giving our customers only the best experience; in line with this vision, the brand launched everything needed for a perfect yashmagh. Hence, we also provide our customers with special Yashmagh mist and shampoos to ensure that their yashmagh is kept well and offers comfort. We were also one of the first few boutiques focusing on Emirati men's accessories and fashion especially yashmagh and the ghutra which are key to Emirati men's fashion.

What is at the core of the brand's DNA? The core of our brand's DNA is the representation of authentic Emirati menswear and the gracefulness it brings. We have been working on this and want to continue focusing on the quality of our yashmagh. We want the users of our product to really understand the true essence and the meaning of the real Emirati headgear for men, we want to bring this forward with class, minimalism, and great quality.

Who is the Signature Yashmagh man client? Our product is for everyone. While the majority of our customers do come from Emirati

backgrounds who wear the iconic headgear and look neat and graceful in their day to day life, but we also have many expats and tourists that have shown interest in the Emirati culture and the yashmagh.

The history behind the headgear is to protect from the heat and over time it has become an unwritten signature for all Emirati men. We wanted our product to stay true to its history and we take pride in the garment. Therefore, the signature Yashmagh man is anyone who is affectionate and interested in our Emirati culture, who wants to understand our signature and our identity. **How do you approach client retention and client engagement?** As we mentioned, we started online only, mainly on Instagram just out of love for what we wanted to do. We were able to get first-hand responses and feedback. This proved great because we were able to incorporate this effectively almost immediately. This tremendously helped us maintain customer relations and maintain a level of happiness with our customers. The store we opened was because we understood our customers wanted to have a physical space for a brand they have loved so much. Our clients are our family, and not just because we say it but because they've made themselves so. We are always interacting with them; we always have referrals from our clients – that's how genuinely they love the brand. We also work towards launching new ranges as and when we think it's time, again, we rely on our feedback. I think our formula is creating a great product and having your customers decide and give consistent feedback.

What have been the hurdles you've experienced throughout your careers? Challenges and hurdles are a part of everyone's life & careers, very important to succeed. Since our careers were so diverse, each one of us faced a different challenge. When we started the brand, it was essential to align ourselves to it and understand how the start phase would look like.

AP: Time Management was a huge challenge for me, I found it difficult to allocate timing to all that I was doing and since the brand came from a place of passion, I wanted to be able to give it nothing less than my 200%. I always intend to do everything down to the dot and be on point with all my tasks, so this habit made it a little challenging for me to manage my work day in a way where I was able to do my best for everything.

MM: For me it was time management as well and aligning with the others; my availability. As co-founders, we need to have regular meetings to discuss things together and for this, we need to find a time that suits everyone. This was a bit of a task; because of our separate work backgrounds and fami-

lies, appropriate handling of time and our efficiency needed to be managed.

KB: I agree with all the challenges that my friends have mentioned but I also believe that since we were and are a startup, we required more effort and more hours of hard work put into our brand. Time management, availability and operations all seem more important to a startup than others, so I feel that now we are just understanding our business and learning as we grow.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, what have been the milestones? We started our brand right before Eid in 2019 and we have progressed so much as we are coming close to our two-year mark. The response we received in the first year of our brand itself was a very significant milestone to us and was like a tipping point for us, we didn't expect to reach 2000 loyal clients while working virtually nor did we think that we would get orders back-to-back, but this really pushed us to perfect our products and operations. We started gaining new customers from different backgrounds and our sales were soaring, this allowed us to keep our company values intact and better our logistics activity.

We are also very proud of our brand engagement with many customers coming back to us for more, this shows us that our brand is loved and in demand. Another milestone that we are grateful for is that many customers have become like family because they appreciate our quality and offering, so our brand loyalty and brand engagement is very high and we are always getting feedback from our clients, our family. Recently, a huge milestone that we achieved was opening our first physical store in the largest mall (Dubai Mall) in the world, this has made us so proud of our progress since we were able to do this just within 2 years and it is just a stepping stone to the other wonderful things we want to accomplish for our brand. This also sets the pace for other things coming; we plan on achieving another one of our milestones soon, which is delivering our orders in record time, we are almost there but we are working towards bettering ourselves and shortening the wait.

What do you see for the future of Signature Yashmagh? We are so honoured and grateful for all that we have achieved in the last two years, how we started and where we have reached now makes us feel so good.

Our future plans are of course to expand the brand and to be available to all our customers over the GCC, of course, the bigger goal is to expand internationally with different retailers. We also aim to just grow the brand and build an image where people can understand the essence and our mission better, we want our customers to get top quality Emirati headgears in our region as well as internationally.