

The right click to a beach lifestyle



With its base in Bahrain, beachwear e-boutique Maison du Maillot has positioned itself as the bridge between Asia and Europe, and the conduit to a vibrant beach lifestyle in the sun-drenched GCC, **RetailME** reports

It's an easy one to answer, but the question is still worth asking.

What do you get when you combine year-round sunshine and pristine beaches with a fashion conscious clientele and the ease of online shopping?

The answer is, well, elementary – an online shopping destination exclusively for beachwear.

Bahrain-based Maison du Maillot, French for 'House of Swimsuits', is a young online boutique store that made its debut early this year and is already a popular beachwear shopping destination.

Co-owners Fifi Faiz Fakhroo and her sister Leila Siassi Faiz say the idea for the website came to them when they realised it wasn't easy finding fashionable beachwear anywhere in the region. "We'd always struggled to find beachwear here in the GCC where the year-round sunshine makes for a beach lifestyle. So it made sense to source items associated with such a lifestyle to this part of the world," says Fakhroo, who is communications director of the new venture.

"People here just don't realise there's a range of beautifully crafted swimwear available out there. It was a great and exciting opportunity for us to discover designers and bring their creations to our boutique," adds Faiz, operations director of the e-boutique,

Everything Maison du Maillot offers

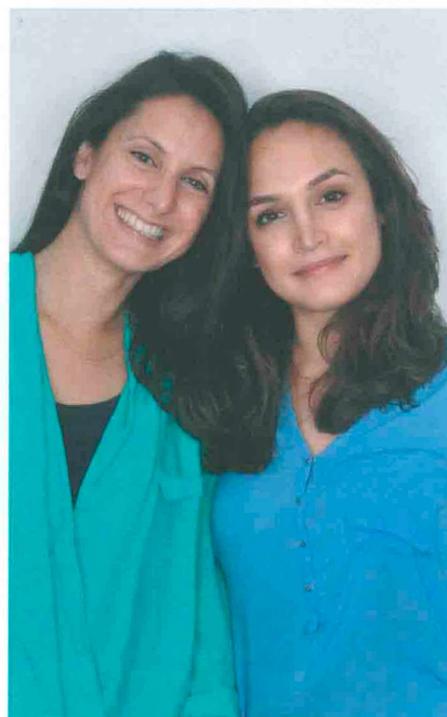
is chosen with passion and enthusiasm, Fakhroo points out. "It's a matter of pride to source the latest in international beachwear so our customers can access highest quality brands sporting the most contemporary designs," she says.

That's where the sisters' extensive travels and experience in varied markets helps. Fakhroo's eye for style and knowledge of what's in is what brings a range of pool and beachside looks – from free flowing kaftans to bright bikinis – to the easy-to-navigate website, observes Faiz.

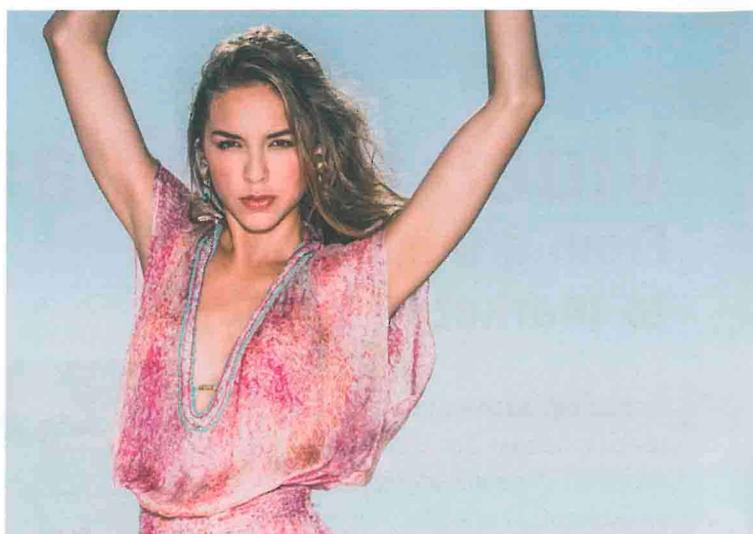
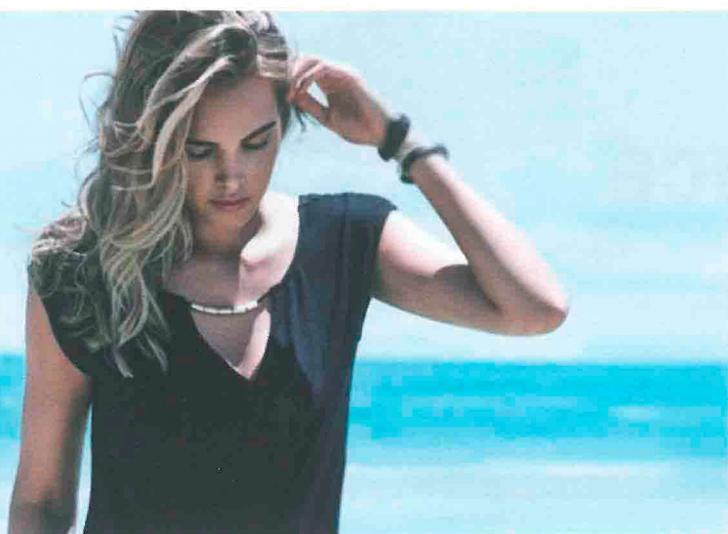
"We bring together influences from wherever we've lived and travelled – the laid back and casual beach style of Los Angeles, the contemporary and international flavour of London ... We also have family in Barbados, so we hope to soon channel the island's vibrant island style into the business," she declares.

The sisters source their products after extensive research, regularly visiting trade shows dedicated to swimwear to better understand global trends. "A business-to-consumer website like ours needs to constantly source new designers, new looks and up-to-date trends if we wish to provide great service and cater to what our customers want," Fakhroo explains.

So the sisters were at the Miami Swimwear Trade Show this year, claiming the "products for the next season look great".



Fifi Faiz Fakhroo and Leila Siassi Faiz



Maison du Maillot stocks its products in Bahrain so it can better manage shipments and ensure better delivery standards and customer service. “Having everything here in Bahrain makes it possible to ensure next-day shipping anywhere in the Gulf and two-to-three-day shipping elsewhere in the world,” Fakhroo says.

The sisters feel their Bahrain location is a plus point since it bridges Europe and Asia, ensuring their customers receive their purchases smoothly and quickly. “Our base in Bahrain is a positive. The business environment here is mature and supportive of start-ups and the logistics provide just the right foundation to grow from strength-to-strength,” Fakhroo observes.

Another plus point is that the e-boutique provides a tailored customer service experience in both Arabic and English, Faiz adds.

Working with designer wear has its temptations, she says, pointing out that if it weren't for the business the sisters would keep whatever they display at Maison du Maillot for themselves. “We just love all the pieces. After all we put in a lot of effort choosing products of the highest quality and impeccable style – exactly the way our customers want,” Faiz avers.

maisonmaillot.com is an easy-to-use, regularly updated website that's achieved high popularity as a result of the extensive marketing campaigns the founders have run. “We are one of the few online clothing businesses in the region - and that too for beachwear,”



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Fakhroo says.

The business has a simple and straightforward revenue model. “We bought our initial stock outright so we could keep the products in Bahrain and ensure high packaging and shipping standards. It's only now that we've begun getting more designers on consignment,” Faiz points out.

The e-boutique banks on both traditional and digital PR strategies. “The cost of traditional advertising is high for a start-up like ours, so we constantly seek creative avenues to market the company in low cost ways. It certainly keeps us on our toes,” Fakhroo adds.

The sisters say the website gets a healthy number of visitors every month, with online sales figures increasing month-to-month. “Our customers come from all corners of the globe. But I'd say that outside the GCC, the US is probably our largest base,” Fakhroo points out.

Faiz says they haven't noticed much difference in customer behaviour in different regions judging from the orders placed. “However, our kaftans and beach dresses have been especially popular in

this region,” she adds.

The sisters have one question playing on their minds a year after their website launch – should they open a bricks-and-mortar store or not? “We've been hosting pop-up shops around the region, which has been a great way to meet customers and get the Maison du Maillot word out. But as far as conventional physical stores are concerned, we'll have to see what the future holds,” Faiz says.

“The online vs physical stores is a debate of the digital era. We're part of the millennial generation so online shopping and the digital world are natural steps for us. This part of the world is beginning to see more and more online stores, tailored payment gateways and growing consumer confidence in regional websites and we certainly want to be part of that experience,” Fakhroo adds.

Maison du Maillot emphasises the fact that it's a socially responsible business, pointing to its tie-up with ‘Water is Life’ to which it donates 1% of its sales. “We both have a background in the NGO world so starting a socially responsible company was very much part of our ethos. We aspire to incorporate our beliefs and values in our company and see ourselves as ambassadors of these values in our day-to-day lives,” Fakhroo comments.

“Clean water is a basic essential for sustenance and ‘Water is Life’ provides drinking water, sanitation and hygiene education to communities around the world to lift them out of poverty,” she adds, pointing out that the initiative is promoted on the boutique website as well as through social media. ■