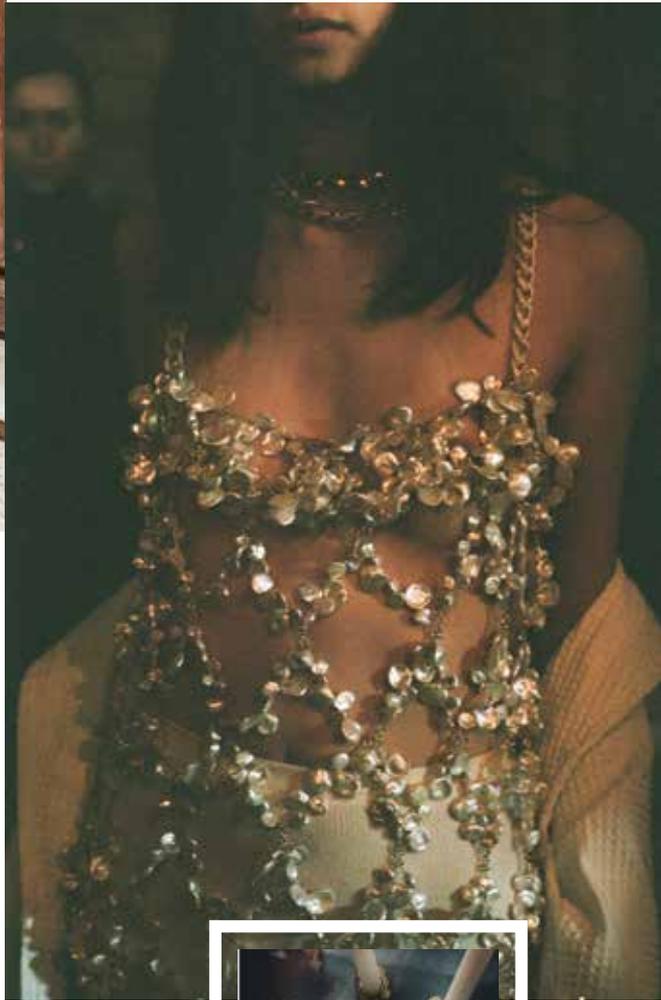


INTO THE WORLD OF



A young Rosh Mahtani with her mother at their home in Zambia



Rosh Mahtani

Her studio full of historical collectibles resembles the British Museum and her literary influences never run dry. London-based Zambia-raised Indian jewellery designer lets *Vogue India* into her beautiful life. By **Akanksha Kamath**

When we speak, Rosh Mahtani, the founder of Alighieri, tells me how her show a month before lockdown was eerily prophetic. Titled ‘The Wasteland’, her collection, made of beaten gold medallion necklaces, mismatched earrings and hair accessories, complete with crevices and undulations, symbolised a modern-day wasteland. “We were all going so fast. Technology was keeping us more connected than ever before, yet less together than we’d ever been,” she says, incredulous that it took a pandemic to straighten out our priorities.

After an exciting start to 2020, where her four-year-old label won the Queen Elizabeth II Award for British Design (all her jewellery is made within a mile’s radius of her studio in London’s legendary jewellery district Hatton Garden), it’s been a period of returning to the basics. In lockdown, she continued to hand-pack each order at home—with a note and flowers, just like her team did at the studio—and devoured emails titled ‘#AlighieriLoveLetters’ landing in her inbox for a time capsule project she had initiated. “My favourite letter came with a quote by Haruki Murakami that read: ‘I dream. Sometimes I think that’s the only right thing to do.’” >



Clockwise: A portrait of the designer; a model wearing bejewelled ready-to-wear from the autumn/winter 2020-21 collection; a lockdown letter; a map of Hatton Garden, where family jewellery businesses date back to the 16th century. “Sometimes, you can still see a diamond deal happening on a street corner,” says Mahtani of its old-world charm

COURTESY ROSH MAHTANI; GETTY IMAGES; REDD MORANO

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The days going ahead may look different, but for now, Mahtani's mornings continue to start at 4.30am. She still digests two books a week (a habit unchanged from her days studying French and Italian literature at Oxford University), and when in doubt, she reaches for her eternal inspiration—Italian poet Dante Alighieri's epic poem 'Divine Comedy'. "Believe it or not, people think my name is Alighieri, and it's a misnomer I happily do not correct." Here, she tells us more...

Clockwise: "I love collecting old things—Roman fragments, busts, casts and vessels," Mahtani explains of her studio that looks like an antiques shop; sculpting jewellery from wax; Mahtani's oldest edition of 'Inferno' (part one of Dante's 'Divine Comedy') from the early 1800s. "I bought it when I got my first stockist, *Matchesfashion.com*," she says; Her mother was the face of the spring/summer 2020 campaign; "We found an old workshop in Spain that used to make Salvador Dalí's footwear. That led to our collection of espadrilles, manufactured by the workshop"

"Jewellery was meant to be passed down through generations"

The jewellery in the fashion industry, especially by the bigger brands, was very trend-focused: in one day, gone the next. It made me sad because jewellery is inherently talismanic and symbolic. I used to go through my mum's jewellery box so passionately as a child. She had inherited an old coin necklace from her mother-in-law at her wedding. I loved it so much. When I graduated, I asked her to let me make a cast of it. I broke up my replicas into four different chapters, and we called it 'For Old Time's Sake'. That was the first thing she gave me, and the first piece of jewellery I made.

"I see Dante's work as all-encompassing"

It is multifaceted; there are so many different threads to pull on. He looked to the Romans for inspiration and to great poets like Virgil and Homer. He essentially wrote about life and love lost and found, but he also wrote about politics, exile, history and religion. His work was an allegory of life. When designing, I pivot back to his manuscripts to find my own autobiography within it. Recently, I've found myself looking to artists who'd looked to Dante for their inspiration, like TS Eliot and Salvador Dalí (who did illustrations of 'Divine Comedy').

"Not every discipline is its own. Life doesn't work like that."

At school we were made to separate everything. But when you're running a business, your art class is your maths class—you have to know how much something costs and how much you want to sell it for. I could never imagine just being the creative. ■

