



## **F**inalist at the Jewel Awards

**2009; winner at the Precious Awards 2008 (Best Creative Business); winner at the Mayor of Hackney Awards 2009 (Best Women's Business); member of the Courvoisier The Future 500 network; one of Debrett's People of Today...**

When you read a list of some of the awards already attributed to Imtaz Khaliq, then see the MBE after the name, you begin to realize how highly regarded and influential she has been in the world of tailoring. J4T talks to Imtaz about her career; tailoring; mentoring; teaching and the future.

# Tailor maiden

Just4Textiles Editor Rose Sinclair talks to Imtaz Khaliq MBE, bespoke tailor extraordinaire, and finds out how it is possible to be female tailor in a traditionally male domain

"Ever since I was really young I was interested in tailoring, I knew what I wanted to do, and sewing skills were encouraged when I was growing up. It was great to have a sewing teacher who picked up on the fact that I could do really advanced work in embroidery and tailoring."

### **Tailoring Technology**

"After school, I did a three year tailoring course in two years; it was a really diverse course and encouraged me to go forward. The course itself was very much focused on fashion from a production point of view – it really gave me an insight into what it would mean to work in the fashion industry.

“As is the case with all fashion courses, I had to create a collection of garments for my final year. I was selected to show at Harrogate Fashion fair, alongside fashion luminaries such as Hardy Amies. Interviews followed and I continued to thrive on the course, winning awards and trophies. At the end of the course I did look for work, but I was not trained as a designer, and decided I did not want to work in a factory on the production side.”

### Setting up my own shop and label

“When I was 18, my dad had an empty shop which I persuaded him to let me use. This enabled me to work with the local tailors and develop my own clients. After four years of gaining this valuable practical experience, I decided to branch out and travelled to London.”

### The next phase: London College of Fashion (LCF)

“I applied for and gained a place at the London College of fashion. I was really excited, and learned a great deal. As part of the course, I participated in an exchange programme with Philadelphia (USA), which led me to Saks on Fifth Avenue, New York. On returning to the UK, I created my final collection. The collection was well received and I landed an interview with the Burton group, but was deemed unemployable because I had my own business, and I was a little older than the other graduates leaving college. I was not deemed suitable for senior design roles as I needed more experience – I attended lots of interviews and kept hitting brick walls.”

### What next, Harvey Nicks?

“I was finally able to land a part-time job in Harvey Nichols, the high end department store in Knightsbridge London. At the same time I set up my studio in

### Carving out a career

“You can carve out a career in fashion, but you need to have skill and a clear vision. I now give talks to young Asian boys and girls, telling them how to succeed in business. Here are some of my top tips:

- Talk to the right people
- Don't underestimate the power of networking
- Always be professional
- Don't take no for an answer
- Find your niche or USP (unique selling point)
- Make to the highest quality”

London and began making suits and selling them in the city. By chance, a stylist saw my suits and told the fashion editor of the Sunday Times about my work; on my 30th birthday, my answering machine was suddenly full and the telephone was ringing off the hook. I realized that, as a female tailor, I was pretty rare – a Sunday Times article gave me the wider audience to showcase my work.”

### Building the entrepreneurial spirit

“Until that point, all of my clients came to me by word of mouth or recommendation from friends or other clients that I have made garments for. I found that getting good press would also garner more clients, and realised that I needed to understand the world of business in greater depth and also transfer that knowledge to my business. I would need to do further study, and had the choice of either the RCA or Westminster.”

“In the end I chose Westminster, embarking upon a degree in Business and Marketing. I was able to utilise my creative thinking skills and move into analytical thinking. I was lucky that because



Imtaz in her studio

of my background, and my prior experience, I was able to go straight to the 3rd year of the course and completed it over a period of 18 months part-time.

“I was driven and motivated to do well, and ensure the development and growth of my business. A key shock was when I was asked by one of the lecturers to teach one of the modules on the course.

“My thesis on marketing theory and retail strategy was sent to Germany to be second marked and was well received. My entry into teaching developed – I was able to combine teaching and studio work, as my studio was based in Bond Street – and soon I was teaching retail and marketing strategy at Westminster and LCF. Through teaching, I learned that marketing is part of the creative process.

“For many of today's students, marketing and retail strategy is almost an afterthought, and as a result they don't engage with the world of business as effectively as they could. Competition is fierce in the world of fashion, and knowledge of marketing and retail can give you that needed edge.”

[www.imtazkhaliq.com](http://www.imtazkhaliq.com)