

# One to One with Keith Vaz MP

## Sona Jivraj

Sona Jivraj was born in London in the year of 1980. Educated at the London School of Fashion, she opened Wembley boutique Sonas Haute Couture in 2004 soon after graduating, determined to make her ambition of becoming a fashion designer a reality. Celebrated by clients for the precision cut, intricate embroideries and refined embellishments of her designs, she has attracted an eager customer base early on in this venture. Having been established for nearly a decade, Sona has her finger firmly on the pulse of bridal fashion and style, using her knowledge to bring the latest catwalk trends, both western and eastern, to her customers. Sona has positioned herself to be one of UKs leading designers.

### 1) Please tell me about your current position?

I am the owner and designer of Sonas Haute Couture.

I am in charge of designing all collections from concept to completion which entails designing the garments, sourcing materials and ensuring that my vision on paper comes to reality with the help of my production team.

I also consult for brides & grooms who need a bespoke outfit designed for their special day. This involves understanding their requirements and altering designs we have in store or creating something unique. I work hand in hand with my clients to ensure that we can deliver for their special day.

As with any business owner my role varies from day to day and I spend a lot of my time on management and training. I am a firm believer that my products speak for themselves but also that the customer experience in SONAS is just as important.

### 2) What are your proudest achievements?

Working with Michelin-star restaurant Nobu Park Lane, I was approached to dress Nobu's guests at a private launch event called 'Enchantments of India' at Mayfair Hotel in London.

I have designed collections for many key artists and renowned celebrities such as Mark Ramprakash MBE wedding outfit, Manrina Rhode's (Rishi Rich's wife) reception outfit and red carpet style pieces for celebrity Laila Rouass to name a few.

Most recently I designed a collection for artist Rahat Fateh Ali Khan for his 'Voice from Heaven 2013' live tour around the world.

### 3) What inspires you?

I live and breathe fashion; any culture or style. I am always inspired by trends from the past to modern day and how quick fashion changes. People inspire me. I love to people watch and simply see what people wear and how they put things together for all events and occasions.

My inspiration can come from anywhere. People, music, television, or even a walk in the park. I believe the key is to be in an inspired state of mind and the inspiration will always come.

### 4) What has been the biggest obstacle in your career?

There are a lot of competitors in the fashion industry who tend to replicate and resell my designs. I strongly believe fashion is about individuality, and sometimes find it disheartening that people simply copy



my designs to pass as their own. However, it's the name of the game and I'm constantly told to look at it as a compliment.

### 5) Who has been the biggest influence on your career to date?

I would have to say my family, in particular my dad. I come from a background of family businesses and SONAS is no different. I am very blessed to have had the support and the drive from my family. They constantly keep me on my toes and push me to expand and step out of my comfort zone. It's great for me as I always have people I can trust around me which is crucial in business as well as people who give me honest criticism when needed. I know a lot of people cannot work with family, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

Family support coupled with my passion for what I do has played a huge part in my success today.

### 6) What is the best aspect about your current role?

As much fun shopping for a bridal outfit can be it can also be quite overwhelming for many brides who don't know what they are looking for. Designers should create bespoke garments to each indi-

vidual bride and think out of the box when designing such rather than the one fits all idea. I believe the best aspect of my current job role is when I have designed 'the perfect wedding outfit' for that special bride/groom. There is a sense of gratitude they express that nothing can beat and it makes my job all the more worth-

while.

The catwalks are a great buzz and I usually still don't believe that it's actually my designs on all these models when it's happening.

Also, the ability to fuse eastern and western designs in my works and expressing my capabilities through my designs whether it be demure and traditional or high fashion with elegance. To put it simply, I love what I do and it gives me a great sense of achievement to see an idea come to reality.

### 7) And the worst?

Admin! Creative people don't do admin. However business owners have to. So I would definitely say the administrative tasks of running the business take their toll on me every so often.

Also, having to keep a limit on number of designs I create for my store each Season. It is a common mistake for retail businesses to overstock more than necessary, inventory is key to many successful businesses.

### 8) What are your long term goals?

To establish Sonas Haute Couture as an International leading brand.

I'm looking in ways to expand using technology to tap a global market as we live in a

day and age where anything is possible - so any business needs to take advantage of this to keep up.

The Sky is the limit for us. We have recently been getting more interest from central London clientele as well as buyers abroad which is very positive for us. We pride ourselves in that most of our clients come from referrals which means we must be doing something right, and our growth plans include ensuring that our relationship with our brides and grooms as well as the quality of our outfits are the main priority. We are confident with that element being mastered the rest will follow.

### 9) If you were Prime Minister, what one aspect would you change?

Immigration - I would look to put stricter measures to ensure that migrants were adding value to the UK economy and not at the expense of the UK residents. The countries Benefits and Health systems are being put under immense stress due to the influx of migrants who do not wish to work and just claim benefits. The UK is seen as an easy country to reside in due to its benefits.

### 10) If you were marooned on a desert island, which historical figure would you like to spend your time with and why?

Gandhi - to learn and understand his philosophy of life. Gandhi had a different view to real life problems which I feel are lacking in today's world. His philosophy on everything was to tackle any problem with love. If I sit with him I would understand how such a great mind works. It would be interesting to see what separates a man like him from all other humans who were all born equal and maybe even take a small bit away from him would be invaluable.