

ABRIDGED VERSION

Jewellery, Heritage, and Identity:

In Conversation with HRH Princess Nourah Al Faisal

By Gjoko Muratovski

Introduction

It began, as so many things do, with a sketch—the bare outline of an idea and the quiet pull of curiosity. It was whilst redesigning a pair of her mother's earrings that HRH Princess Nourah bint Mohammed Al Faisal discovered she might well possess what she would come to call "the feel for stone"—that rare instinct which allows one to read the energy of a gemstone, to sense the harmonies between shape and colour before a single setting has been made.

Her interest in jewellery design led Princess Nourah to study the craft with Parisian craftsmen who rank amongst the finest in the world. Born into the Royal Court of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, she had grown up already acquainted with the world of fine jewellery—its weight, its language, its quiet significance. Whilst in Paris, each day at lunchtime, she would walk through the Place Vendôme, pausing at the windows, studying the displays with an unhurried eye, gradually refining a vision that was entirely her own.

Her first pieces were made to order—for family, for close friends. Word travelled. The circle widened. In 2014, she opened her first boutique on the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré and gave the brand a name: Nuun. It has since been described as one of the best-kept secrets of the Parisian jewellery scene—a reputation built, above all, on extraordinary craftsmanship and a distinctly modern reading of traditional design.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity. The full version of this interview will appear in a forthcoming issue of the journal *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture*.

Gjoko Muratovski: ***Where does your passion for jewellery come from?***

Princess Nourah: Jewellery was, and still is, my first love. Long before there was a brand, long before there was a business, there was simply a fascination with objects and the stories they carry. It was through jewellery that I first began to understand design. Of course, I learned about form, proportion, materials, and function, but what captivated me most was something less tangible. I became fascinated by the ability of an object to hold meaning.

Some of the most powerful objects we own are not necessarily the most valuable materially. They are the ones that connect us to people, places, and moments that would otherwise be lost. I experience that personally through a piece of jewellery I inherited from my grandmother. It allows me to feel connected to her in a way that is difficult to explain. The object itself matters, but what it carries matters more. It holds memory, presence, and continuity.

Even today, after everything else I have done, that remains the aspect of jewellery that fascinates me most. Not simply what it is, but what it means to the people who live with it.

Gjoko Muratovski: ***How did Nuun come to be?***

Princess Nourah: Nuun came much later than most people assume. For nearly fifteen years I was designing jewellery for friends and family. I loved the process of creating, but I never approached it as a business and certainly not as a brand. At the time there were very few female jewellery designers in Saudi Arabia and only one with an established brand. Becoming a professional designer was simply not something I had imagined for myself.

The person who changed that was my father.

It was also my father who encouraged me to establish the brand in France. It was where I had trained, where much of my professional network existed, and he believed strongly that the work deserved an international audience. I still remember his words. He said, “Go and compete with them in their country.”

My father understood something that took me much longer to understand myself: that the work did not need to be confined by geography. It could be rooted in where I came from while participating in a global conversation.

Gjoko Muratovski: Your father held important political and government roles in the Kingdom, yet I recall that you once mentioned to me that he was also a



poet. Perhaps this is why he understood better than most that creativity is not exclusive, and that it is not something that comes at the expense of other things, but complements them. He was well aware that you can pursue creativity alongside other things in life; that you can be a Princess, a leader, a businesswoman, and a designer.

I would like to know more about your family's relationship with the arts and culture. How important was that appreciation whilst you were growing up?

Princess Nourah: It was enormously important. I grew up in a family that not only appreciated culture but understood that it was central to identity. Culture was never something separate from daily life. It was something that was lived, practiced, and shared.

Some of my earliest memories reflect that understanding of culture as a way of transmitting knowledge. One of my favourite memories is of sitting with my grandmother in the desert. She would recite poetry in a sing-song voice while drawing patterns in the sand. Through stories, poems, and drawings she would teach us about the animals that lived in the desert, showing us the different tracks they left behind so that we could recognise them when we encountered them ourselves. Looking back, I realise she was teaching us far more than how to identify an animal. She was teaching us how to observe, how to pay attention, and how knowledge can be passed from one generation to the next through creativity and storytelling.

I think those experiences shaped me profoundly. They taught me that culture is not something preserved behind glass. It is how we carry knowledge, values, memory, and identity forward. When I look at my work today, whether in jewellery, heritage preservation, or cultural development, I can trace much of it back to those early experiences and the people who shared them with me.

Gjoko Muratovski: Nuun is now a global brand and most of the work that you do is bespoke, sold exclusively by appointment. Your jewellery can be found from Monaco to Singapore, from Tokyo to St. Petersburg. But you began by establishing yourself in both Paris and Riyadh. In Paris, you initially had a window display at the Four Seasons George V hotel. Afterwards you commissioned the design of a showroom on the famous Faubourg Saint-Honoré, opposite Le Bristol Paris luxury hotel.

This, however, was a different kind of showroom to what most people might expect from a luxury jewellery brand. The beautiful small boutique did not really follow the established trends that other, more corporate jewellery brands typically follow. Your space was bright, light, intimate—very understated, but with a distinct level of modern sophistication.

Tell me more about the inspiration behind the space and the vision you had for it.

Princess Nourah: It was important that the space feel light, welcoming, and completely unintimidating. I wanted people to feel comfortable walking in, even if they had no intention of buying anything. I wanted them to enjoy the experience, to explore, to ask questions, and to spend time with the jewellery.

Perhaps that comes from the way I view jewellery itself. I have never believed it should sit at a distance from the people who are meant to enjoy it. I feel the same way about exhibitions. I do not like creating barriers between visitors and the objects on display. Whenever possible,

I want people to touch the jewellery, wear it, interact with it, and experience it for themselves. Jewellery is ultimately something that lives with the body, and I think it should be encountered in that way.

Looking back, I think the space succeeded because it felt personal rather than theatrical. It was not designed to overwhelm visitors with luxury. It was designed to make them feel welcome and to allow the jewellery to be experienced naturally. For me, that has always been far more important.

Gjoko Muratovski: ***How do you feel working in these two distinct cities—Paris and Riyadh—and how does each of these places influence you as a designer?***

Princess Nourah: Paris taught me the importance of ecosystem. It taught me that great design rarely happens in isolation. It requires craftsmen, suppliers, workshops, dealers, mentors, and institutions. It showed me what becomes possible when an entire system exists to support excellence. It also taught me something about elegance. Not as a matter of luxury, but as a matter of restraint. What makes something truly beautiful is often its simplicity. That lesson resonated deeply with me because it echoed something I already understood from my own Bedouin heritage. In both cases there is an appreciation for clarity, for removing what is unnecessary, and for allowing the essential to speak for itself. Saudi Arabia gave me something different.

It gave me identity. It gave me authenticity. More importantly, it gave me a way of understanding the world.

One of the things I love most about Saudi culture is its ability to bring together elements that might initially seem unrelated and create something meaningful from them. Historically, this land has always been a meeting place. Through trade, pilgrimage, and exchange, ideas, materials, people, and influences passed through and left their mark. That ability to absorb, connect, and transform is something I recognise in my own work.

Gjoko Muratovski: I know that you designed a collection for the British luxury brand Asprey. This is fascinating for a few reasons, one being the remarkable heritage of the brand, of which you are now a part too.

Founded in 1781, the House of Asprey has historically been recognised as one of the world's pre-eminent luxury goods brands and has a substantial client base of members of royalty and heads of state. Asprey has a long and established relationship with British royalty dating back to the 1800s when Queen Victoria awarded the first Royal Warrant. Since then, Asprey has held a Royal Warrant for every British monarch to Queen Elizabeth and several other foreign heads of state. The House currently holds a Royal Warrant as Silversmiths and Goldsmiths by appointment to HRH King Charles III. What makes this extraordinary is that unlike the British royals who were their patrons, you have left your mark there as a creator. ***Can you tell me more about your experience with Asprey and how that came about?***

Princess Nourah: Asprey approached me after seeing some of my work, which in itself was both exciting and slightly intimidating. At the time, Asprey was one of those great historic houses that you grow up knowing and admiring, so the idea of collaborating with them felt like a tremendous responsibility.

What many people do not realise is that there were actually three separate collaborations, each very different from the

others. The first was a limited collection of handbags. I was asked to reinterpret one of Asprey's most iconic bags, and I created five versions inspired by different regions of Saudi Arabia. Each reflected a distinct colour palette and embroidery tradition. It was an opportunity to introduce elements of Saudi identity into a house with a very different heritage.

The response surprised everyone, including me. The collection sold out before its official release and, according to Asprey, became the fastest-selling collection in the company's history. More important than the commercial success, however, was what it taught me. Until that point I had wondered whether there was truly a place for Saudi cultural references within international luxury. The success of the collection confirmed that there was. It showed me that authenticity resonates far beyond its place of origin.

The second collaboration was a ring design, and the third was perhaps the most ambitious. Asprey invited me to reinterpret their historic Feather Collection for a younger and more contemporary audience. As part of the process, I was given access to the archive and images of the original designs.

I remember the day I presented the collection very clearly because I was convinced they would reject it. The designs represented a significant evolution of the original pieces and looked very different from anything Asprey had previously released. I was so concerned that the transition might feel too abrupt that I recreated the classic Asprey design catalogues and inserted my illustrations into them, hoping that presenting the designs within a familiar visual language would make them easier to accept.

What surprised me was how quickly they approved the collection. There was no resistance and no attempt to pull the designs back towards the original. Instead, there was an extraordinary amount of trust.

Looking back, that may be what I remember most from the entire experience. Not the collections themselves, but the willingness of a historic house to allow its heritage to evolve. It taught me that preserving tradition does not mean freezing it in time. Sometimes the best way to honour a legacy is to allow it to continue growing.

Gjoko Muratovski: It is fitting, perhaps, that jewellery of that calibre has so often found its way to queens and princesses—women for whom jewellery was never merely ornamental. You create primarily for women. ***When you are designing your collections, is that the woman you design for?***

Princess Nourah: Not really. I do not tend to begin with the woman herself. I begin with the reason the piece needs to exist. One of the first questions I ask is why. Is it a gift? Is it marking a milestone, a celebration, a loss, a promise, a memory? What is it intended to carry forward? What will it mean not only today, but years from now? I am interested in the relationship people form with jewellery over time. How will it be worn? On what occasions? What story will become attached to it? Will it eventually be passed on to someone else? What memories will it accumulate throughout its life?

Of course, understanding the person matters. Every commission is deeply personal. But I have never been particularly interested in designing for a specific category of woman, whether that is a queen, a princess, a collector, or anyone else. What interests me is significance. The pieces that stay with us are rarely important because of their monetary value alone. They become important because


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to continue growing.’
– Princess Nourah

they are connected to moments, people, and experiences that matter. Perhaps that is why I have always viewed jewellery differently from many other objects. A piece of jewellery lives with its wearer. It accompanies them through different stages of life. It becomes part of family histories. In some cases, it outlives the person for whom it was originally created and takes on new meanings for the next generation.

So when I design, I am not really thinking about status or title. I am thinking about meaning. I am thinking about the story the piece will carry and the legacy it may one day hold for someone else.

Learn More

In the full version of this interview, Princess Nourah and Gjoko Muratovski engage further in more personal and intimate discussions reflecting on her journey as a jewellery designer, cultural leader, and founder of the Paris-based high jewellery house Nuun. The discussion continues to explore the relationship between craftsmanship, cultural heritage, and contemporary design, highlighting how jewellery functions not only as adornment but also as a carrier of memory, identity, and social meaning. Princess Nourah discusses the influence of Saudi Arabian culture, Bedouin aesthetics, and her apprenticeship with master craftsmen in Paris, as well as her work in heritage preservation through the Saudi institution that she leads, Art of Heritage. At the same time, Gjoko Muratovski reflects on the traditional jewellery of his native Macedonia, and both draw parallels between these two nations, their distinct tribes, and their cultural heritage seen through jewellery.

The interview offers insights into the ways Middle Eastern cultural traditions can be reinterpreted within contemporary luxury design while remaining rooted in authenticity, demonstrating the continuing relevance of heritage as a source of creative inspiration and cultural continuity.

Coming soon as an Open Access feature in a forthcoming issue of the journal *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture,* courtesy of Intellect Books.

Contributor Details

Dr Gjoko Muratovski is an award-winning designer and innovation consultant working with a wide range of universities, Fortune 500 companies and various governments from around the world. He has been a member of several prominent thought-leadership organisations, including the European Commission, Forbes Councils, Stanford Institute for Innovation in Developing Economies, Oxford Digital Leaders Network, Yale Higher Education Leadership Summit and the White House Presidential Innovation Fellows Program. During his tenure in the United States as the inaugural Ullman Endowed Chair and Director of the Ullman School of Design, Dr Muratovski collaborated closely with the late Myron Ullman, former group Managing Director of LVMH, CEO of LVMH USA and Chairman of the international diamond company, De Beers. He currently serves as the Chief Innovation Officer at Icona Design Group, an Italian automotive design consultancy with a portfolio that includes clients such as Lamborghini, Alfa Romeo and Maserati. He is also a Strategic Advisor to HRH Princess Nourah Al Faisal and HRH Princess Noura Saud Naif of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.