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'YOU SPIN ME ROUND'

Treasures from Nada Debs' travels



The designer Nada Debs in 2019

## Get Up, Stand Up

After a year of continued crises, Beirut's creative set is more determined than ever to survive—and thrive

When a devastating explosion tore through the Lebanese capital last summer, the city's independent artists and designers, whose jewel box shops and busy studios fill the neighborhoods closest to the blast zone, were among those particularly impacted. For the country it was the latest tragedy in a year already marked by the pandemic and a collapsed economy.

"As a community, we felt like we'd all been hit together," says designer Tatiana Fayad, a cofounder of the high-fashion women's brand Vanina ([vanina.me](http://vanina.me)), whose store in the bohemian enclave of Gemmayzeh was heavily damaged. The network of designers, many of whom have been friendly for years, have always tried to bolster one another in the absence of more formal support, says Fayad. "We don't have organizations that help us or teach us how to sell abroad—so we learn from each other." That ethos of team spirit has persisted, with home-spun recovery efforts that are as inclusive as possible.

For Beirut native Sarah Beydoun, the chaos felt familiar. Beydoun grew up during the country's 15-year-long civil war before establishing Sarah's Bag ([sarahsbag.com](http://sarahsbag.com)), an accessories line based in the Achrafieh district. At its peak it employed →

PHOTOGRAPHS: TAREK MOKKADDEM, NADA DEBS

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Nada Debs' design studio, in 2019



Bokja taps local craftspeople to create its detailed pieces

some 200 women, including inmates from Baabda women's prison. But the explosion, like the war before it, couldn't shake her loyalty to the city. "I always told myself that I would stay in Beirut, unless my kids and I were in danger," she says. "And after the blast, I found that we had lived through the sort of catastrophe I was always afraid of. But again, I was not ready to leave."

Nada Debs, the owner of an eponymous furniture shop in Gemmayzeh (*nadadebs.com*), is moving on—but in her own way. Rather than restore her ground-floor boutique, she plans to move her wares upstairs, where she has her studio, leaving the street-level space as a memorial to the blast, filled with showpieces made from remnants of the windows and doors. If nothing else, says Debs, the tragedy offered a chance to reset. "After we repaired our studio, I felt this positive energy here," she explains. "If we're going to do something new, it's going to be more thoughtful, more mindful. We're not going to do things the way we did before." **BETSY BLUMENTHAL**

**SHOP STEADY** While many travelers won't be able to visit Beirut for some time, they can support its hard-hit designers by purchasing their wares online. Here, four more to check out:

**Bokja**

The founders of this design studio, whose intricate pieces incorporate regional textile practices, started Bokja Mends, an initiative to repair damaged furnishings using its signature brightly colored stitching, at no charge. [bokja.com](http://bokja.com)

**Sandra Mansour**

Known for her sharp but feminine aesthetic, the designer was forced to delay a planned H&M capsule collection; it launched just three weeks late, with H&M pledging \$100,000 to the Lebanese Red Cross. [sandramansour.com](http://sandramansour.com)

**L'Atelier Nawbar**

The fourth-generation jewelry label saw its Saifi Village flagship destroyed. Still, it managed to draw beauty from tragedy with its Fragments of Beirut collection, made with shards of broken glass from around the city. [latiernawbar.com](http://latiernawbar.com)

**Roni Helou**

With his avant-garde, sustainably minded fashions, Helou has been one to watch since founding his namesake brand in 2017. Though his Mar Mikhael atelier was destroyed, he debuted a new collection during Milan Fashion Week in September. [ronihelou.com](http://ronihelou.com)