Fatma Ghaly

Azza Fahmy Jewelry

“ I saw an opportunity to create the first Egyptian designer brand. ”

COUNTRY	Egypt
INDUSTRY	Consumer
EMPLOYEES	180
YEAR SELECTED	2008
WEBSITE	www.azzafahmy.com

COMPANY SNAPSHOT

Internationally recognized as the leading jewelry designer of the Arab world, Azza Fahmy Jewelry (AFJ) is a family business that has evolved into the first Egyptian designer brand. Led today by Fatma Ghaly – the business-savvy daughter of original designer and founder Azza Fahmy – AFJ is home to two generations of female entrepreneurs.

Featured in The Wall Street Journal, Forbes, Vanity Fair, and Harper's Bazaar, and worn a number of celebrities, including Queen Rania of Jordan and British supermodel Naomi Campbell, AFJ's trademark design incorporates a modern twist on tradition, turning Arabic words and poetry into intricate calligraphy inscribed on silver and inlaid with gold. This hand-crafted jewelry blends Islamic motifs and modern designs using gold, silver and precious stones and some of the world's oldest production techniques, including filigree work (delicate ornamental work of fine silver, gold, or other metal wires). Known for its stunning design and outstanding craftsmanship, AFJ holds itself up to the standards of Cartier and Bulgari as a global reference in luxury design.

As Azza tells it, the story of AFJ "starts with a book." More precisely, a book about classical jewelry in the middle ages in Europe displayed at the first book fair ever held in Egypt. The book cost nearly a month's salary, but for Azza – at the time a young civil servant with a degree in interior design – the inspiration it provided would prove priceless. Inspired by the beautiful designs of the jewelry she encountered, Azza decided then and there to become a jewelry designer. She rolled up her sleeves, put on her overalls (literally!) and served as an apprentice in a workshop in Khan El Khalili for the next two years. For a young, educated woman to be apprenticing in this type of a workshop in 1970s Egyptian society was more than socially unacceptable: it was downright crazy!

Undaunted and inspired, Azza continued to study her craft and develop her entrepreneurial ambitions. She caught her first big break in the mid-1970s when she was awarded a fellowship to study jewelry design and manufacturing at the London Polytechnic School. Azza's design skills blossomed while in London, and she returned to Cairo with broadened horizons and greater confidence as a jewelry maker. By the early 1980s, she had set up her own workshop, employing two workers.

Over the next decade, Azza expanded her small business, growing the company from a one-woman show into a small, structured organization. In 2000, Azza's older daughter, Fatma Ghaly, entered the family business (her younger daughter, Amina Ghaly, now also works with AFJ as a designer). While studying at Helwan University (Egypt), Fatma worked part-time in senior marketing positions. In July of 2003, AFJ was re-established as an LLC under the name Jewelry of Egypt. After the re-establishment, Fatma rose to become AFJ's deputy general manager in 2006, and began to actively shape the operations and future vision of AFJ. A great example of entrepreneurship from inside a family company, Fatma is the driver behind AFJ's ambitious plans for expansion. Fatma has helped grow AFJ into a multinational, globally recognized brand. As a member of the Jewelry Sector Steering Committee with the Ministry of Industry and Foreign Trade, Fatma is also involved in cultivating this nascent industry in Egypt.

Today, the company has more than eight retail stores in Egypt, as well as stores in Italy, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE, and the UK. In December 2009, AFJ celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Azza Fahmy label (established before the company) by launching its Opus Magnum collection. Together with British label Preen, AFJ showed its products at Fashion Week in New York. Azza Fahmy and her designs are recognized in Egypt as an impressive – and rare – tale of entrepreneurial success. With a second generation of passion and entrepreneurial initiative now fully committed to the family business, AFJ's future continues to look bright.

ENDEAVOR AND AZZA FAHMY JEWELRY

Through the Endeavor network, Fatma has received introductions to designers and potential partners. Through the G-Lab program, she received advice on expansion, and has benefited from other services such as a local needs assessment and ad-hoc connections.