

Dedicated follower of fashion

Meet the woman bringing French minimalism to the Middle East

WORDS: KERRY MCDERMOTT

For those of us not lucky enough to have been born in Paris, the pursuit of Parisian style – and that air of insouciance that goes along with it – can become an obsession. We devour books devoted to the subject (model Ines de la Fressange's style guide *Parisian Chic* became a New York Times bestseller), and searching Paris street style on Pinterest or Instagram throws up thousands of images of Lou Doillon, Emmanuelle Alt and Caroline de Maigret looking better in a pair of jeans and a cashmere sweater than most women could hope to in a ball gown.

Spend long enough lusting after this look and a few basic tenets will become apparent. First, bright colours are a no-go area. Ditto bold prints, and over the top accessories and platform heels are out, too. Looking at that list it would be easy to conclude that Paris and Dubai – a city that loves a statement clutch, a pop-art print and a sky-high stiletto – are as far apart when it comes to fashion as they are on the map. But not according to Emma Di Rito, a Paris-born, Dubai-based entrepreneur who, together with her Belgian friend and partner Alex Bouvy, has created a thriving business around making their favourite European brands (think Isabel Marant, The Kooples, Maje, and Zadig & Voltaire) more accessible to women here in the UAE.

"We actually didn't set out to start a business," former lawyer Emma says of So Chic, which offers a carefully curated selection of pre-loved clothing at

pop-up sales in Dubai. "We were just missing the brands we loved from back home." Both relatively new to Dubai – the pair became friends when their daughters started playing together on the beach – Emma and Alex bonded over their shared love of fashion, and tapped up other well-dressed women they knew to curate So Chic's first sale of pre-owned designer clothes. The response was so positive they decided to keep going, and what began as a small gathering of stylish women has now turned into an

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all-day event that sees queues of customers arriving early to secure the best haul. And who could blame them for wanting to be first in line, when previous sales have featured unworn Chloé Susanna boots, Chanel espadrilles, and mint-condition Céline totes, and all at a fraction of the price they would be in the Dubai Mall?

"We never expected it to turn into this," says Emma, 41, whose young family relocated from Geneva two years ago when her husband was offered a job in the UAE. "We didn't study or work in fashion – although we are both very experienced in shopping. I used to work as a lawyer at Galeries Lafayette in Paris. That's about as close as I got." What makes So Chic special, says Emma, is the selection process, a fixed window of time before each sale when

clients can bring their unwanted clothes to the girls for consideration. "We are so selective when it comes to style and brands," Emma says. "We stick to a very Parisian look and I think that's why it works. The chance to buy French style – that's what people want." Emma herself, dressed for *Stylist's* shoot in black leather trousers and a simple white blazer, certainly has the whole effortless cool thing nailed, and she admits she and Alex only accept items that they would wear themselves. "It's not

women have picked up while travelling, but then the size or fit is wrong," Emma explains. "We have also started to bring some select brands back from Paris, ones that don't have shops here." The partners, who have a concession at D.ales on Jumeirah Beach Road, choose pieces that work for their market. "We adapt it for Dubai," says Emma. "We won't take the coats or the jackets, or the shorts that are too short."

The importance Emma places on this editing process calls to mind another French woman: Vestiaire Collective co-founder Fanny Moizant, whose own pared back uniform of jeans, loose tops and understated heels and handbags is very much reflected in what's available on the designer resale site. With So Chic soon to set up home in bigger and more permanent premises (inside Blanc D'Ivoire Dubai on Al Wasl Road), it seems Emma's aesthetic is similarly in demand. So what hints can she give us on how to dress the Parisian way? "I think in Paris, and in France in general, there is less colour, and we don't use a lot of prints. Black, white and grey are the only colours we know," she half jokes in her charming (naturellement) accent, "except for maybe a light pink. Parisians care more about material and cut than the brand, which shouldn't be visible. The labels aren't there to be shown off." Sounds simple. And so chic.

The next So Chic sale will take place at Cove Beach on 15 March, 8am to midnight; facebook.com/sochicuae



CÉLINE BAGS REGULARLY CROP UP AT SO CHIC SALES

EMMA MEANT IT WHEN SHE
SAID PARISIAN WOMEN
LIKE MONOCHROME

