

All That Glitters Is Silver

By Ayesha M. Ali



Zeenat Saeed Ahmed is tall. Very tall for a Pakistani woman, 5 feet nine, and as if that isn't enough to distinguish her from us Lilliputians, she has the added distinction of being one of the few Pakistani women who only wear the graceful sari.

Better known in Karachi as the owner of Sehr Boutique, Pakistan's first ever fashion designer, she ran two branches of the boutique for twenty-five years, since the 1970's. Owner of a garment factory, she manufactured clothes for export to the UK and Europe. Her famous buyers included John Lewis, Debenhams, Miss Selfridges, Littlewoods, Hennes and Mauritz, Karstadt, Neckermann and Quelle.

Today, yet again, Zeenat is the proud owner of "Taneez", a glittering new boutique stocked with silver handicrafts. "Taneez" is "Zeenat" spelled backwards!

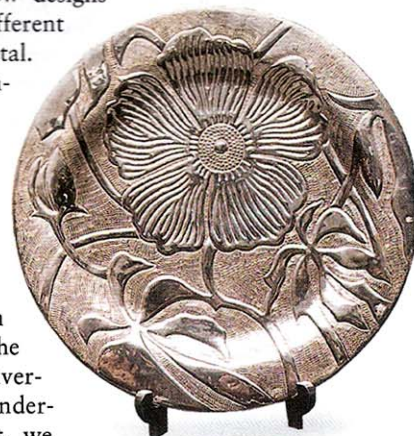
A Pakistani businesswoman, she lives her life exactly as she chooses to. She believes that getting ahead in life and self-fulfilment require certain qualities, which she claims to possess, "I'm optimistic and liberal, educated and well-travelled, have a zest for life..... I also have razzmatazz." Whatever that means! She seldom lets things bring her down and if they do she pulls herself up and starts designing. "Keep your mind busy and it becomes less of a devil's playground. Then sky's the limit," says Taneez's owner.

Taneez is located on the third floor of the chic and modern Park Towers Mall, in Karachi's Clifton area. A boutique, specialising in classy,

unique, beautiful items of silver-plated ware for the home and office.

Zeenat designs all the items herself, but admits candidly that she sometimes takes valuable tips from her karigars (craftsmen) who know their mettle - pun intended. She says she can't depend solely on their concept of design, because unfortunately most of them are uneducated. They just inherited the craft, but made no attempt to diversify or use new designs or incorporate different materials in the metal.

"Their workmanship is superb and they respond very well to new ideas, but cannot create them." However, she has an excellent working relationship with them which shows in the quality of the silverware. "They've understood what I want, we have a mutual under-



Taneez offers a glittering array of silverware.

standing." You walk into Taneez and instantly but pleasantly are blinded by the opulent glitter of silver. An array of vases, bowls, candle stands, trays,

planters, ice buckets, wine chillers, photo frames, salt and pepper shakers, urns, champagne flutes, fruit bowls, water goblets, jewel boxes, dip dishes, duck bottle openers, match boxes, ashtrays, serviette holders with semi-precious stones - to name just a



Zeenat Saeed enjoys a moment in front of her silverware shop.



few of the several items. The household range is very impressive. I even saw joss stick holders and bookmarks in silver! However, the silver money clip lying on a tiny black velvet cushion was a great idea, as one never knows quite what to buy for a man.

As eyes adjust to light, one is bowled over by the sheer scale of design and creativity. An attractive pencil holder with what looks like an agate; a semi-precious stone artistically embedded in the metal. A delicate soap tray with floral soaps nestling on it; you look further and admire the orchids frothing out of an exquisite planter - it's the silver planter that's for sale - the orchids, like the floral soaps are there simply to indicate the usage of the item.

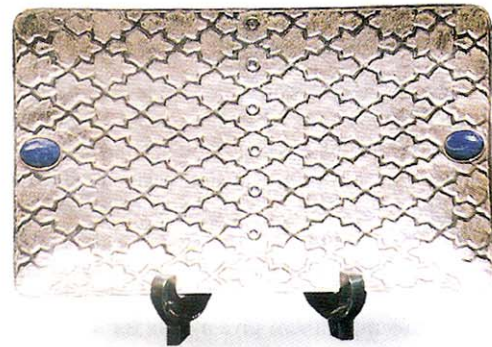
Zeenat finds it necessary to explain, sometimes even educate her customers as to how to use a particular item for the embellishment of their homes and offices. Her office collection is impressive too. She has pen quills in silver, jotters, diaries, telephone books, silver pencil jars, pin trays, book-ends with marble, paperweights in silver/marble, picture frames and silver visiting card holders. You name it, Taneez has it!

Zeenat has a natural flair for recognising beautiful things. She delved deep into her creative mind and came up with fascinating new ways of gift-

wrapping and presenting the items. An elegant black and silver, tasselled box to present your gift in, so no additional wrapping is required and lovely shopping bags in which you carry away your buy. Her flair for designing is inborn, but she says humourously that she often gets flashes of brilliance in the most unlikely places, like the time when she was "in a crowded, slummy bazaar and there was a goat bleating nearby."

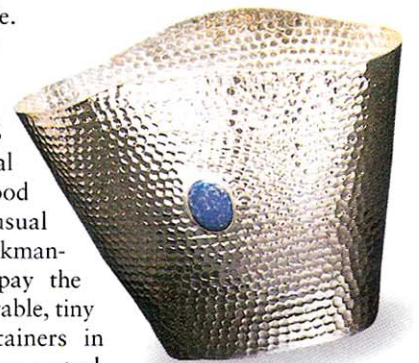
She has recently begun using calligraphy in her design concepts. Wall plaques with the words '*Bismillah ir rahman ir rahim*' beautifully carved out of metal, silver-plated and lacquered to prevent tarnish. Zeenat says she has created almost five hundred new designs recently. For inspiration and ideas, she has gone as far as Spain. The symmetrical beauty of ceilings of the Al-Hamra Mosque in Granada inspired her to incorporate their design into her silverware. Her fascination for Moorish architecture has produced a variety of typically Moorish designs on trays and low candy bowls.

Islamic tile designs are another hot favourite at



Taneez.

Prices at Taneez are extremely reasonable. Beginning from Rupees 200, approximately US\$3.50 and Rupees 9,000, about US\$ 145.00, for exceptional items. If you want a good thing with an unusual design and good workmanship, logically you'd pay the price for it. Utterly adorable, tiny salt and pepper containers in *karahi* (wok) shapes, are a steal at Rs. 400, and will not tarnish for at least a year and a half. Not only good value for money, but also something unique. Zeenat is contented with the reception her silverware has received from discerning Pakistanis, who are always on the look out for new ideas and unusual designs.





A selection of Zeenat's creative silverware. Attractive prices have caught the eye of discerning Pakistanis.

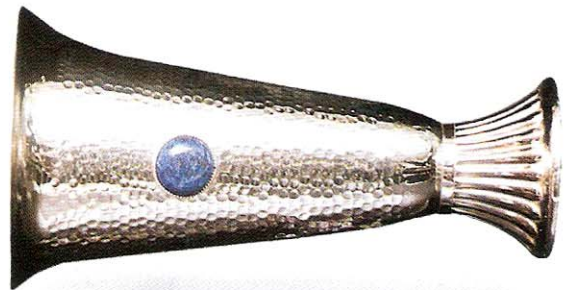
She has held many exhibitions in Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad and now plans taking her exhibition abroad. She is an old hand at foreign exhibitions, as she attended and exhibited at many textile exhibitions in Paris, New York, Dusseldorf, Kuwait, India, Toronto, Nairobi, Cologne and Frankfurt, when she ran a garment factory and was Pakistan's only fashion designer. She has organised several fashion shows within Pakistan, and others abroad.

Zeenat makes fascinating give-aways for corporate clients and has recently been asked by foreign airlines to supply them give-aways for their First Class and Business Class passengers. Many multinationals order her items as corporate gifts. When she first opened the Park Towers outlet, customers were so impressed with the décor and the ambience of the shop, they wanted to buy even the light fittings.

Taneez has something for every strata of clientele. Wedding or birthday gifts, office or household items. She has chosen just the right items to produce and market. Although Pakistan has a lot of silverware, real and plated, the indigenous designs are the same, unchanged in fifty years. Taneez, happily for us, has filled the void in the handicraft market by giving local materials; pewter, aluminium and brass a new lease of life with chic designs and new ideas. Embellished with semi-precious stones such as malachite, agate, lapis lazuli and sandstone, which add value and enhance the creative styles.

At the end of our meeting I asked Zeenat if she planned to carry on and diversify still further. "Definitely. I want to establish businesses which my grandchildren will inherit and run."

There you have it. The end is nowhere near for



Photos courtesy of Women's Own.

Zeenat Saeed Ahmed's 'zest for life'. It must go on.

Taneez: Level three at Park Towers Mall,
Clifton Karachi.

Tel: 586-7255, 583-2525 ext. 312

Email: taneez@mail.com