

Rock 'n' Roll star



Since graduating from Central Saint Martins in 2004, Zara Simon, jewellery designer – and daughter of Peter Simon, former Portobello stallholder and founder of Monsoon – has been making her mark. She talks to **Lucy Land** about her inspirations

'Perfect timing,' says Zara, rolling away her gold and precious jewels following a photo shoot for her latest collection at Westbourne Studios, as I arrive, flustered, 15 minutes late. Tawny-skinned, tall and slim, she is striking but in a natural un-made-up way. Dressed down in jeans, she dresses up in her jewellery and carries a gorgeous embroidered bag that looks like it's one of those secret-finds from one of her many travels to India. 'It's from Accessorize,' she reveals. I should have known. The second eldest daughter of Monsoon founder Peter Simon and his ex-wife Kate, creator of Accessorize, Zara embodies her parents' eclectic aesthetic and happily promotes her family brand.

Zara grew up in London and Hampshire and went to school at Bedales. Like her sister Jessica (a fashion designer), Zara was artistic rather than academic. She was asked to leave Bedales because of her misbehaviour despite it being a progressive school. Her maverick background provided her inspiration for art. 'I grew up around clothes,' she says. 'Dad travelled back and forth from India and mum wore lots of jewellery. When I was stuck in bed for six weeks after having my tonsils out at 17, I started to make beaded jewellery with Swarovski crystal and semi-precious stones.'

Today, Zara, 27, is wearing jewellery from her latest collection; lots of charm pieces mixed with brightly coloured semi-precious stones set in gold, and layered necklaces.

'I can take a piece off my necklace and turn it into an earring,' she demonstrates. 'I love mixing and matching charms. I can take the stones out of my rings and put them into my earrings.'

What does she love about jewellery? 'Mainly the colours – I love the shimmery blue mineral Labradorite. I like the graphic shapes you can make with the metals that help bring out the colours of the stones. Jewellery has an intrinsic value; it doesn't decompose,' she enthuses.

'I travel a lot and gain inspiration from different cultures, landscapes, colours and shapes in nature.' Ibiza is Zara's second home; her parents have a house there. 'The people in Ibiza have a unique funky style – it's pretty eclectic.' She also spends three months of the year in India. 'India has had a big influence on me because of my dad's travels there. Indians still make everything by hand – there is real craftsmanship to making jewellery. India is so beautiful; the light is amazing and the women wear so much jewellery.' Her work placement with Stephen Webster during her jewellery design degree at Central Saint Martins also played a big part in her career and he, along with Pippa Small, remain her favourite contemporary jewellers.

What's her idea of bliss? 'Being on the beach or on a boat – anywhere near the sea.' So Notting Hill might seem an unusual choice for home. 'This is where my friends live,' she says. 'Notting Hill is a creative area; everyone's artistic. It's also great because you can walk everywhere. It has a village feel and there are some fantastic restaurants.' Her favourite places include Osterio Basilica for lunch or The Electric (handily, owned by her father) for lychee martinis, and the Wine Factory (on Westbourne Grove) for a few drinks. Friends describe Zara as easygoing and down to earth but she also has a

reputation as a party girl – she has appeared in Tatler's The 100 Most Invited list in the last couple of years. 'Friends often have parties at The Cobden Club on Kensal Road. One of the best parties I've been to was a friend's on a beach in Ibiza – Danny Tenaglia played,' she reminisces. So, as a designer, who would she most like to create a piece of jewellery for? She takes a few moments to consider: 'Anthony Kedis from Red Hot Chili Peppers.' What has been her greatest achievement so far? 'Last summer I designed a collection for the Rolling Stones,' she says, without hesitation. Quite fitting for a laid-back party girl.

You can see Zara Simon's latest collection at The Cross (141 Portland Road, W11). She is also exhibiting her jewellery at A Jewellery Affair on the 1–2 May at the 20th Century Theatre. Turn over for more about the event and some of the other contemporary designers showcasing their work.

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