

# Style Guru



Looking good isn't just about wearing nice clothes, says 31-year-old **Rana Saab**, an AICI certified image consultant; it's also about staying true to yourself and projecting your inner self in your visual image. With over 300 clients under her wing in just two years and her own consultancy firm, we should probably pay heed to the new ME ambassador for AICI.

**Arabian Woman (AW): What exactly is an image consultant?**

**Rana Saab (RS):** An image consultant is your partner in success. She will help you project your best image by aligning your inner self with your visual appearance. An image consultation will give you the tools to look and feel great. On a daily basis, I manage and grow my business by attending to client requests (phone, email, proposals), sourcing out affiliate services, scanning the fashion trends (online, through magazines and at store level), writing for fashion blogs, planning new ventures, style advising at retail stores and following up on work in progress.

**AW: How long have you been in this industry and what were you doing previously?**

**RS:** I have been in the image industry for almost three years now, but I didn't start my business until two years back. In the first year, I was consulting on a part-time basis as I had just given birth and wanted to dedicate more time to being a mother. Moreover, I was preparing for my image certification and travelling to appear for the exams and coaching lessons. So, practically, I can say I am working full time for around a year now. I was in advertising before, working as an art director and managing/positioning the image of brands instead of real people.

**AW: Tell us about the defining moment when you decided to start your own business.**

**RS:** I was eight months pregnant with my first child when I decided that it was time to quit the corporate world and do something less stressful. The idea of running my own business wasn't very clear in my mind at that point. All I wanted to do was explore something I love and take it easy. I was researching the net for 'image and style' classes in New York and I never knew that there was an established industry as such. So, instead of signing up for Lamaze classes I went for image consulting training! I was in love with the whole idea by the first week and decided this is all that I want to do in the future. And then it hit me that this is what I wanted to do all along but I never knew it could be done at the time. That was when my younger sister reminded me of a comment I made while watching a movie more than 10 years back; I was taken by the outfits and the role of one of the actresses who was a personal shopper. That's when I said "I wish I can do that when I grow up, shop for people all day long..." and I'm sort of doing that now!

**AW: So you've always been interested in fashion and the importance of image?**

**RS:** To a certain extent, yes. Growing up in Beirut, I was aware of the fashion and image status as both men and women there are always impeccably dressed and groomed, no matter what the occasion. My mum was a big influence on me as well, as she started and managed several boutiques through the years, and so I was constantly surrounded by fashion.

**AW: How many clients have you had so far?**

**RS:** In total, around 300, as I have had a lot of one-off style advising sessions at retail stores in addition to my own clients.



*This image doesn't demonstrate a makeover, but highlights how a simple clothing choice can make a huge difference! This model shows how the wrong cut, neckline, colour, length and style (L) make her look bigger while the deep V-neckline, diagonal lines, deep colours and right length on the right make her look more vibrant, trendy and put-together.*



**AW: From all the people you've helped, who do you remember the most?**

**RS:** From group workshops to individual consultations, I have helped people reconnect with who they really are and bring out their best no matter what age, size or position they are in. Through my image classes for teens, I help raise their self esteem by helping them learn about managing their image: grooming, body shapes and colours. One teenager sent me a 'thank you' email saying being a size 16, she never knew she could wear jeans and fit in with her classmates! In corporate workshops, I help businessmen and women realise their true image potential by empowering them with the tools to dress for success. The best comment I had was: "This really inspired me to evaluate my lifestyle and plan to look good everyday, even when I'm at work!" In individual consultations, I can see the effect more directly as the person goes through the makeover and reaches their goal. I am only happy when I get comments like "my friends and colleagues said I look 10 years younger" or "my friends think I am glowing all the time now" and "I feel like I am in control again".

**AW: Who are your style icons- of the past and the present?**

**RS:** I love Queen Rania of Jordan's timeless elegance and simplicity. Jennifer Aniston is another style icon who manages to look effortlessly chic all the time. Halle Berry has great sense of style as well and lots of confidence too. And Charlize Theron is the symbol of sexy elegance. She's just stunning.

**AW: How can you help people revamp their style while staying true to themselves?**

**RS:** That is the first step in the image assessment process, finding your style personality by looking at your inner self. No style or image makeover can work if it is not reflecting the person's identity, beliefs and lifestyle. They have to be comfortable in their own skin, or else, even if the result is great, it would look awkward on them. I don't do any extreme makeovers as it has to be genuine and practical. The trick to revamping is establishing the basic style personality and deciding on the

goal in a way that reflects the person's qualities and goals.

**AW: What personality traits, skills and qualifications does a person need to be an image consultant?**

**RS:** An image consultant needs to be a people oriented person, passionate with an outgoing personality and lots of presence. The skills and qualifications are acquired through theory and practice. It's a mixture of artistic and practical approaches.

**AW: What are your future plans for yourself as well as your company?**

**RS:** My immediate future plan is promoting image consulting and raising the bar for this profession in this region, through my role as the Middle East Ambassador for AICI (The Association of Image Consultants International). I have taken the first step by providing accredited image consultant training for people in the Middle East region, in collaboration with an American training school. The first training was done last November and we had five graduates from the UAE, Cyprus and KSA. I am also starting a chapter for AICI in Dubai and it will provide many benefits to all image consultants in the region looking for continued education in addition to affiliate industries.

**AW: How do you find time to relax?**

**RS:** These days, I rarely find spare time as I am always glued to my laptop, on the move or dreaming up new ideas! But when I do get a break, I love to sit and play with my daughter and spend quality time at home.

**AW: How can someone improve their look in three steps?**

**RS:** Update their hairstyle, learn basic makeup techniques to look polished during the day and add one item to their outfit that will take them to the next level, like a tailored jacket for the workplace, a quality handbag or accessories.

**AW: What general advice would you give to someone with little or no confidence? How can they feel better about themselves?**

**RS:** Find out what you love in life, what you are

good at and why only you can make it happen. Bring that out in your choice of clothes and style. Try Power dressing and you will instantly feel in control. When you know you look good, you feel good and people react in the same positive manner to you.

**AW: Does your career mean you have a lot of pressure to constantly look good?**

**RS:** Yes. You can't talk the part if you don't look the part. You become very high maintenance and so it's great if you can barter with your favourite hairdresser, retail shops and grooming companies!

**AW: Do you ever get criticism for building a career around 'image,' which is often seen as a shallow concern to have?**

**RS:** From people who don't understand the true meaning of 'image', yes. But I don't mind, as it is always an exciting challenge convincing someone of such a profession and the impact it has on everyone's life. It wouldn't sound shallow to them after that.

**AW: What is the one piece of advice you would give someone planning to go into your industry?**

**RS:** If you have the passion and determination, go for it! It's a wonderful business with so many opportunities and the best thing is that women can actually have a job and family they love and make a living out of it at their own pace. Not to mention the excuse you will have for shopping all the time!

## Rana Saab offers tips to suit all figures

**Pear shapes:** Play down your bottom part by keeping it simple and clean. Do not clutter or call attention with bright/light colours, patterns, details and shapes. Have fun on the upper part by adding interesting accessories, lighter and brighter colours, horizontal lines, details and texture.

**Very Curvy:** Follow your natural curve lines and don't go for stiff fabric and straight, boxy or geometric silhouettes. Play up your best features and maintain proportion and balance.

**No curves:** Try some design illusions where you will give the illusion of curves such as in waisted jackets and tops, cinched belts, hourglass designs and colour placement.

**Short:** Avoid colour blocking. Don't cut your body in horizontal lines as you want the eye to keep moving with no interruptions. End your hemline on your most flattering part and consider heels with floor skimming pants. No ankle straps and ankle boots! Go for monochromatic or tone on tone colours, vertical design lines in seams, pockets and prints. Avoid large and noisy patterns that might overwhelm your scale. If wearing two colours, go for light on top and dark on bottom.