



ALIVE

Leaving Her Mark

FOR SANA YOUSUF, HENNA IS ALL ABOUT BEAUTY AND EXPRESSION

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Inspiring Aesthetics

• "Inspiration is everywhere," Yousuf says, nodding over to a woman in a purple, floral dress. "Flowers, beauty, the internet; but my inspiration is always brides."



Child's Play

• "The first call I got was for a [kid's] birthday party. When I saw the kids and their smiling faces, it gave me strength and power to learn more and more about my craft."



Growing up in Pakistan, what first drew Sana Yousuf to henna when she was a child was seeing bridal henna and jewelry. "It was very fascinating to me," she says. "Then I

decided that I should try it!" She then began drawing her own designs and practicing her freehand and sketching skills. "When I was eight," she recalls her first attempt, "I drew a small, little flower." Little did she know that her fascination would one day blossom into a full-fledged career.

Years later, while waiting in a long line to get her henna done for the Eid Festival, it clicked: "I said to my family, 'We should buy a cone, and then I'll do it at home.'" After applying henna to her sister's, her sister-in-law's and her own hands, she was encouraged by her family to get started professionally.

Since her professional start in 2012, Yousuf has created henna art for people from all walks of life; from applying Glitter Glam for children's birthday parties to assisting people who are thinking about getting a design tattooed permanently. And although she always gives careful attention to brides—"I do sketches for brides because they have their preferences," she explains—her

absolute favorite projects are creating henna crowns for cancer patients and belly blessings for expecting mothers. "When I see the smiles on their faces, it gives me strength," Yousuf says. "Believe me."

But no matter who her client is, Yousuf is always thrilled to share her craft with them. "Henna is definitely changing," Yousuf explains. "If we talk about 10 to 15 years back, no one really knew about henna in Western countries." And she's right. Although henna is an ancient artform that has graced the hands, feet and bodies of women across the Middle East and Southeast Asia for centuries, it hasn't gained popularity in the West until fairly recently.

However, thanks to the internet and social media, there is a new audience to appreciate the art. Even though she thinks it's become "trendy," Yousuf enjoys sharing her traditions. "I think it's good when Western countries are adopting our culture. I love this. I believe it's good."

For Yousuf, there is no reason for anyone to not have the opportunity to experience henna—she believes that henna can (and should) be enjoyed by everybody. "It looks so beautiful," she says. "Henna only makes you more beautiful!" ■



Henna From the Heart

• Although she loves creating freehand floral designs, when beginning to work with a client, Yousuf loves it when they tell her what they want so she can learn their preferences.

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