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# Turning

FUSING MODERN ELEMENTS WITH TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUES, EMIRATI DESIGNER *KHALID SHAFAR* IS LEADING THE WAY IN THE EVOLUTION OF FURNITURE DESIGN

When defining typical aesthetics of Arabian décor, flocked wallpaper, crystal chandeliers and richly patterned carpets often top the list.

But these heavily detailed elements are being replaced by a more minimalist approach. Emirati designer *Khalid Shafar* combines ancient techniques with sleek, clean lines to create contemporary furniture with echoes of local heritage.

*Shafar* works in a one-storey building, in Dubai's Ras Al Khor district, which is also home to his showroom. This light, airy space houses some remarkable artefacts that are modern yet reminiscent of the emirate's fascinating past.

"The new trend for furnishing in the UAE is moving towards embracing contemporary design, but people often prefer to keep a certain element of tradition through their choice of materials. I think that's very important," he says.

# tables

Shafar is inspired by the UAE's cultural heritage





A counter made from a single piece of driftwood

'Every piece is linked with the culture somehow. The look might be modern but the story comes from the past'



### Only natural

Shafar's latest range is modern yet simple, with a muted palette.

"I wanted to combine black and beige, or a light cream colour. For me, ash is the palest wood, so that was used most often. When we made the coffee table, with the marble top, we used a similar shade of ash to keep the combination," he says.

The counter in Shafar's store comprises a simple plank of driftwood. Although it has been varnished, the irregularly shaped strip has been left largely as found, complete with knot and other imperfections.

"Sometimes you find a single piece of driftwood and its appearance makes you want to use it in a particular way. And then from that, you start designing the object that will fit or expose its most interesting element," he says.

"Sometimes, people prefer not to use wood with knots because it can be harder to cut and quite difficult to plane and clean. Sometimes though, they can be part of the design."

Shafar always aims to link each piece to his heritage, either through thoughtful design, the use of special techniques such as palm-leaf weaving or in more abstract ways.

He says: "We had used existing elements such as the *agal* (the black headband Emirati men wear to keep their headscarves in place).

"We used it in a chandelier. Sometimes you can take an object and reconstruct it."

He adds: "Every piece has a story linked with the culture somehow. The look might be modern but the story comes from the past."

Shafar's 2012 collection featured woven palm leaves, used in building for centuries.



Top left: a table from the current collection. Top right: the black chandelier that incorporates the *agal*, the black headband worn by Emirati men. Left: the bookcase enclosed by a fishing net

"We had palm stools and tables. The tabletops and seats were made by weaving palm leaves in the traditional style by local ladies."

One bookcase is particularly eye-catching; its wooden shelves are enclosed by a dome of mesh. Instantly recognisable as a fishing net, it's a nod to the UAE's maritime heritage.

Shafar had always dreamed of a creative career. He studied interior design and fine art at the American University of Dubai, but soon found his calling.

"We would take short courses alongside studying the main syllabus and one of them was furniture design. At that point I knew that it was what I wanted to do."

He then moved to New Zealand, where he learned how to make furniture by hand.

"They call it a cabinet-making course and timber is the main material. You usually join it together without screws. Learning how to make things by hand gave me the confidence to pursue design again."



## Interior motives

KHALID SHAFAR SHINES A SPOTLIGHT ON HIS FAVOURITE FURNITURE AND FASHION DESIGNERS



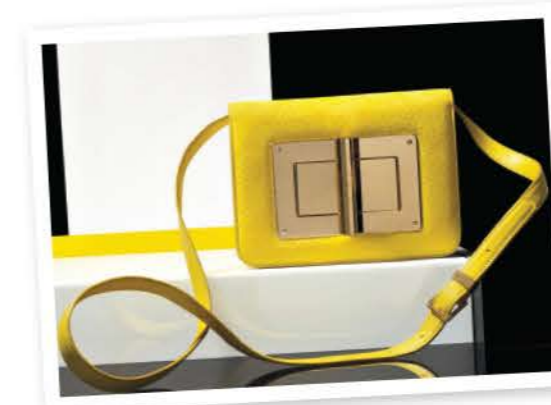
Fernando and Humberto Campana from Brazil are known for their unusual choice of materials. One of their most famous pieces, the Harumaki Chair, is made from carpet and rubber, handcrafted into the shape of sushi rolls. I met the pair at Abu Dhabi Art in 2010 and I am inspired by their talent.



"I love the way New York fashion designer Thom Browne curates his fashion shows and markets the male lines versus the female ones. He pays so much attention to textiles and patterns. It's inspiring."



"In terms of fashion, I'm a great fan of Tom Ford, particularly the way he has positioned his brand, the quality of his work and his attention to detail. Formerly creative director at Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent, he is a big inspiration."



"I really like the work of Nika Zupanc from Slovenia. She is fascinated by the idea of the 'scarlet woman' and is inspired by female lives. Her pieces are sleek and modern as shown in the lights above and the sofa left."



"Marc Jacobs is incredibly talented and creative – I admire the life he gave to Louis Vuitton (where he is creative director) and the life he's giving his own collections. He has also launched a series of bookshops, Bookmarc, which are very interesting and nicely designed, with a lot of coffee tables. Marc Jacobs' creativity, energy and talent comes out of his work."