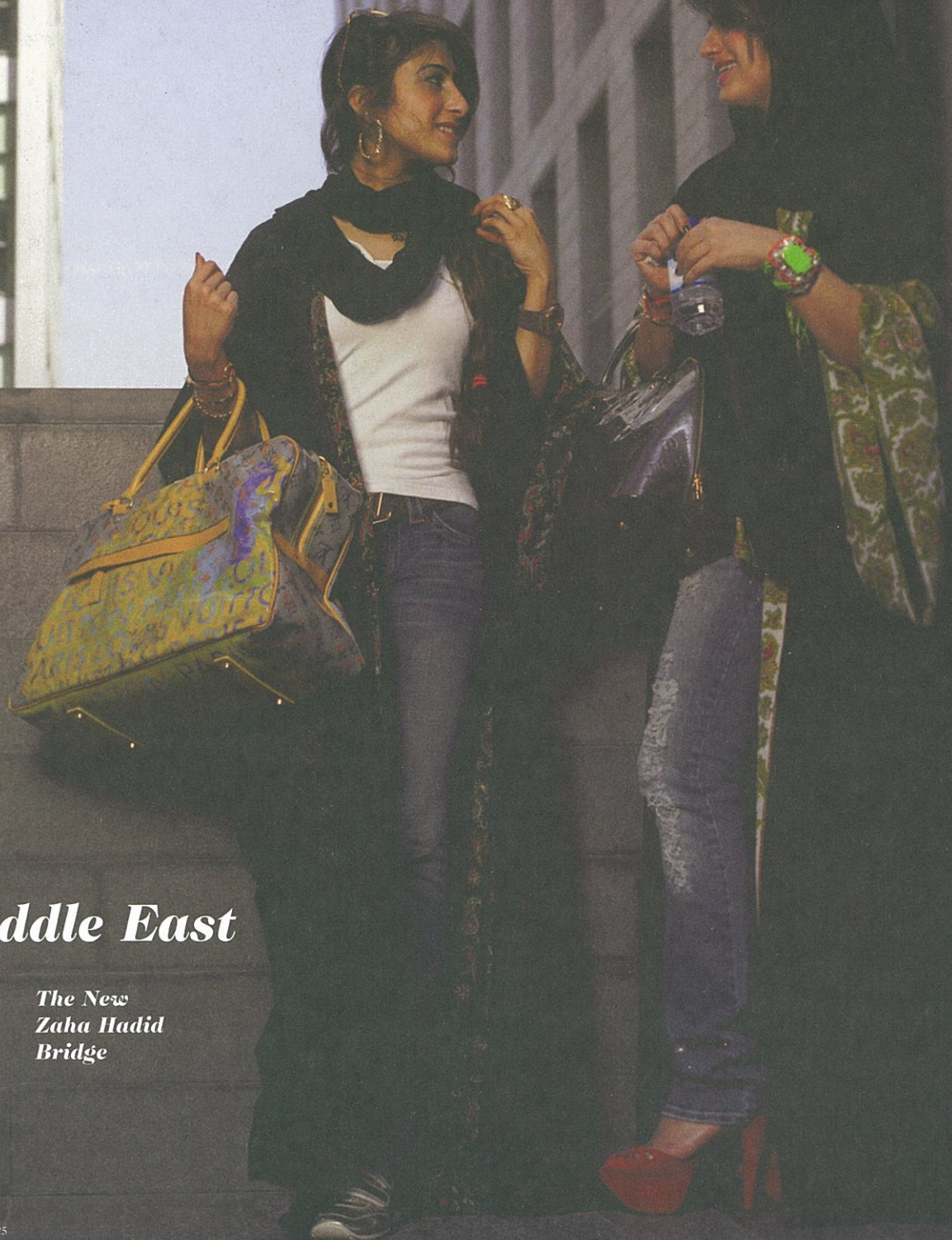


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الدليل الحضري للشرق الأوسط
an urban guide to the middle east



A Design for Life

Story by Adrian Murphy

Pictures by Tim Cuff

Putting aside his high-flying career in the UAE, 29-year-old Emirati Khalid Shafar has relocated to New Zealand to follow his dream to become a furniture designer.

Shafar is taking the Furniture Makers Course at The Centre for Fine Woodworking in the small town of Nelson: population 59,000.

Swapping the sand dunes and skyscrapers of Dubai, Shafar is now surrounded by green hills and mountains as well as plenty of cattle and rain.

"Nelson is a very nice place to live in," says Shafar. "It's very small, yet very convenient and very artistic. Life is very simple here and people are very hospitable and friendly like all Kiwis."

"It has a lot of nature around and beautiful scenes you really can enjoy yourself by walking and driving."

Nelson, situated in the northern part of the

south island, is a centre for art and design.

Shafar started his 10-month course in February, but is not discounting a longer stay as he says he has settled well in his new home.

"At first I thought it would be a shock for me to have this dramatic change in my lifestyle from a busy, vibrant city life to a simple style.

"However, now I believe it's the best thing I did - by moving here to live.

"I needed such calmness and freedom to be creative and produce more.

"I really enjoy the natural scenery in Nelson and its surroundings; the green mountains, the farms, the sheep, cows, and horses, the water views and the fresh air. It's just perfect every morning and afternoon."

Shafar graduated from the American University in Dubai with two degrees: Bachelor in Business Administration/ Management Major

(2002) and Associate in Fine Art/ Interior Design Major (2005).

His most recent position was group marketing director in Dubai Holding Corporate Office where he worked for three years following a similar position at the city's Global Village open air fair.

"Basically design is my passion, specifically interiors. In fact, when I started university in 1998, I had chosen interior design as a major and was the only Emirati and male on the course.

"I had selected furniture design in particular as I always aim to differentiate myself: I don't want to be just another interior designer from the Middle East.

That was the moment I decided to design a piece of furniture that will carry my name forever, and here I am now starting this path. So design is my route. I don't think it's too late.

Shafar says he loves almost all types of furniture. However, he has a special interest in chairs.

"I adore chairs and their history," he adds.

"I always believe chairs made the best designers in the world because designing and making a perfect and practical chair is very challenging and I believe it is the hardest piece of furniture to design and make."

He started his online search for schools or centres that offer woodworking programme, in the US, UK and NZ. (He had visited NZ for the first time in June 2009 with a close friend and fell in love with the country and its people.)

The centre in Nelson was the only one that accepted an beginners with no experience in woodwork. The study started on February 1, which was perfect for Shafar to finish his duties in Dubai and prepare for the move.

"This centre is the only one in the whole of New Zealand that offers such a course and programme and is internationally recognised," says Shafar.

Since moving to New Zealand Shafar has met only one Arab.

"During the third week of February, at one of the short courses, I met a Lebanese student who lives in Christchurch who was doing a three-day a course. We had dinner in Nelson."

Shafar says he keen to join one of the design firms in New Zealand or Australia to gain experience before going back home to start his own design house.

"I belong to the Middle East and I am very proud to be an Emirati," he says. "So it will be my utmost honour to always represent this part of the world, especially my home country and the lovely city Dubai."

