

# BROWNBOOK

AN URBAN GUIDE TO THE MIDDLE EAST

الدليل الحضري للشرق الأوسط NO. 31

## **LIFESTYLE**

Inside Turkey's social architecture

## **DESIGN**

Oscar Niemeyer's Constantine University

## **TRAVEL**

Profiling Jeddah's creativity

# Sydney Diaspora

We speak to the large  
Arab community  
in Sydney



**PLUS** What would happen if  
Sheikh Zayed Road  
became a park?

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AED 40<sup>00</sup>



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JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2012





# BROWNBOOK

RECOMMENDATIONS

Asmaa Shabibi / Khalid Shafar / Mimi Raad

In association with

 **BlackBerry.**

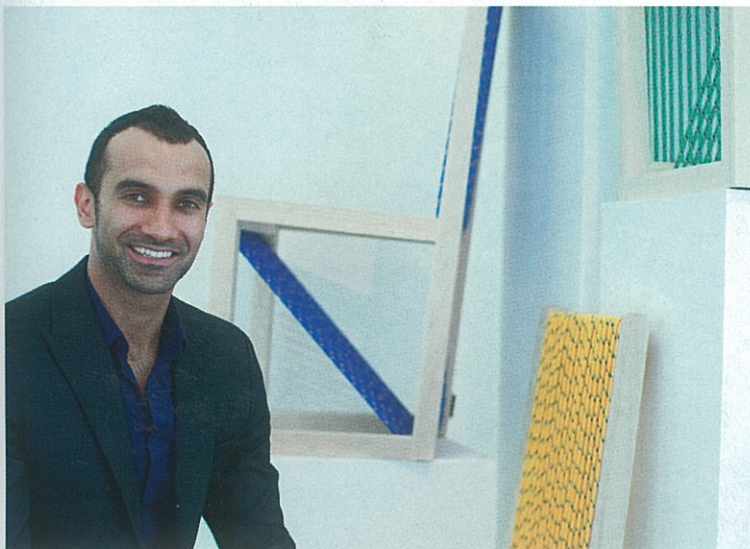
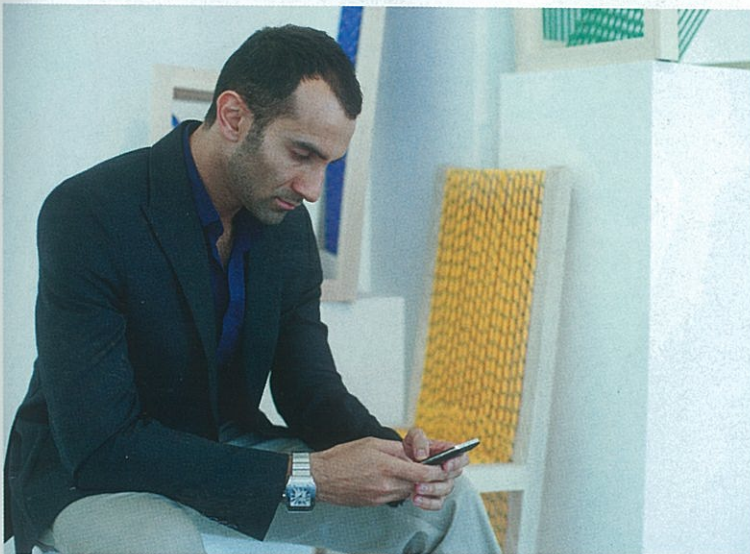


# IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND

Khalid Shafar's designs take inspiration from his culture and therefore tell the tale of his time







The sweep and angle of the back of a chair or the shade caused by the curvature of a lampshade might not provoke more than a passing thought to most, but to Khalid Shafar they are the nuts and bolts of his career.

Furniture designer and former marketing executive Shafar established his own brand characterised by rich details and the use of fine materials. 'My design ethos is a triangle built on three pillars: creativity, functionality and practicality,' he tells us. 'I am influenced by my lifestyle and Dubai, the city I grew up in.' His collections are instantly recognisable; The Palm – an entire range crafted from the flexible and unexpectedly durable fronds of palm trees – is both playful and traditional. 'My surroundings play a strong role in my design process.'

Born and brought up in Dubai, Shafar divides his time between the UAE and New Zealand, where he takes inspiration from the dramatic landscape. Architecture too is important, he continues. 'I have admiration for the Burj Khalifa. It's a unique design in such a beautiful combination. And I love the Porsche. It is the best car to fit my personality. I feel myself behind the wheel.'

Holding the new Porsche designed BlackBerry phone, Shafar says technology is an essential part in his daily life. 'My design process stems from creativity, practicality and functionality, and I look at these same aspects when admiring a piece from another designer or objects that I use in my daily life. Luxury is part of a lifestyle and means power; with that comes confidence. In my home I tend towards minimalism – clean, industrial lines mixed with design elements and plain pieces.'

Simplicity, elegance and originality spill over into Shafar's personal life as well. 'In fashion, whilst I like to follow trends, I also like to wear clothes which represent me. I choose impeccable, chic, elegant, branded clothes with a bit of a twist and unique elements. I like to combine different designers, the crucial criteria being that their clothes are perfect.'

Unsurprisingly Shafar explains that he always loved art. 'People are born with a connection to something – with most boys it might be cars or sport, but for me from the age of about nine or ten it was colours, pencils and crayons. I was always a calm boy who liked to draw. I'd win certificates for art at school; painting or drawing was when I was happiest.'

Although it was a few years before he turned this into his career, Shafar still collected art, researched his culture and history, devoured books and magazines on design and took inspiration from the story of Tom Ford who was a marketing 'genius'. Above all Shafar places the intangible class of the 'old school' as a vital design element.



# Dubai Futures

In November, Brownbook travelled to Japan to host the second Dubai Futures at Tokyo Designers Week. An exhibition and two fringe events celebrated Dubai's emerging creative scene







## *The event*

Hosted at a Florian Busch-designed site erected in Meiji Jingu Gaien Park, with tie-in events in nearby shops, galleries and cafés around the Aoyama area, Brownbook held a week-long exhibition in the main exhibition area, focused on 'environmental design,' straddling all aspects from architecture to fashion to fine art.

Thousands of people visited the show to view home-grown Dubai designer Khalid Shafar's latest furniture collection. His 'The Palm' series inspired by the nascent date palm of the UAE consisted of coat racks, coffee tables and stools all made from hand woven palm leaves, took pride of place in the show and was much to the appreciation of visitors and other exhibitors.

Shafar, 31, is the founder and head designer of his eponymous furniture brand. This career only developed after working in marketing for seven years, after which he found the courage to pursue his true calling in design. He runs his business operations between Dubai and New Zealand and his works are a personal expression of form, movement and emotion. 'I'm particularly interested in the tale of objects, and so I make it a priority to create quirky interiors with stories to tell; this is shown in my current collection, "The Palm,"' he says.

With its history of crafts and its attention to

design details, Japan was the perfect backdrop for Shafar's designs, he says. Coming from a region that lacks a history of rich industrial and product design, his works provoked much interest in the emerging emirate.

Besides the exhibition, Brownbook participated in the week-long programme of fringe events including launching the second edition of the Gold Ring, a manga styled comic book written in Arabic; hosting a VIP dinner at the Park Hyatt's New York Grill, with breathtaking views over Tokyo; and coordinating a focus group discussion with leading Japanese creative minds about Dubai and the UAE.

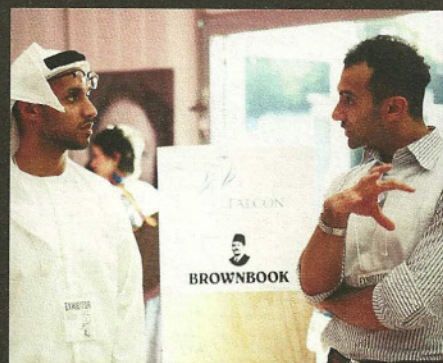
The event – Dubai Futures: Tokyo – was part of Brownbook's constant endeavours to highlight the creativity emerging from the Middle East whilst at the same time showing appreciation and support for the cultural innovators emerging from Japan. This collaborative effort in Tokyo, between Brownbook magazine and Falcon & Associates, succeeded in forging new and productive creative ties between the two nations, whilst simultaneously building upon relations outside the region.

This was the first time a Middle Eastern country had ever made an appearance at this annual event in Japan, giving a platform to upcoming designers, authors and leaders in the creative industries.









## The exhibitor

**Emirati Khalid Shafar**, 31 year old furniture designer, lives in Dubai and New Zealand. His latest collection – The Palm – debuted at Tokyo Designers Week.

**What have you learnt from this experience and what was the reaction from the Japanese audience?**

It was a great eye-opener for me with regard to the Asian market in terms of design, approach and audience. I learnt a lot from the feedback of the audience there. Many were very impressed to see, for the first time, Middle Eastern design presented in Tokyo, and appreciated many of the culturally inspired pieces. The Japanese appreciate crafts and culture and were very interested in the fact that an Emirati designer, like myself, has been able to expose our culture through contemporary objects. Market customisation is important when it comes to the Asian markets, and I found the Japanese look for objects that fit their lifestyle, space, specifications and needs, rather than for the aesthetics alone.

**Your palm-inspired creations have received**

**worldwide acclaim. How does it feel to be able to build friendships between two countries through the detail in your designs?**

I was very glad that the Japanese audience liked my Palm line and appreciated the work in the pieces. For me this felt like such an achievement – that my first collection grabbed the attention of an international audience through a design inspired by my own culture. I always believe that collaborating and participating in international markets should work like a platform for cultural exchange between those markets in all aspects; design is no different.

**This was first time a Middle Eastern brand has exhibited at TDW; how do you feel about this?**

It was a great experience and I felt very proud. This is the first step towards achieving my goal of being perceived as a reference for design from the Middle East and of placing the UAE on the global design map – so that it becomes one of the design destinations. I am confident that this participation will open the door to many others from the Middle East

enabling them to expose their brands to a market that puts craftsmanship at the heart of their design. Especially since the Middle East has a rich history of crafts, particularly in North Africa and the Levant countries.

**How does your work compare to that of the Japanese?**

Exposing the culture of each nation and the use of natural material such as timber were the parallels between both works. Japanese designers are well known for their attention to detail and their craftsmanship and with the Palm objects I showcased at Designers Week, the detail and craftsmanship were vital elements. Yet, each culture has its own unique character which inspires the designs; my collection is unique as it was partially inspired by Emirati culture, making it completely different to Japanese designs.