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adjective: (of a man) confident, stylish, & charming

DEBONAIR

TUMI
NOBLE
BEN SAUNDERS
GILES ENGLISH
THOM SWEENEY
CROMBIE
DUNHILL
DE BETHUNE
BELL & ROSS
LUXOTICA
HARLEY DAVIDSON
OPERA GALLERY
KHALID SHAFAR
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CULTURE

DUBAI DESIGNS

Designer Khalid Shafar is making waves with his eclectic and regionally-inspired furniture designs. *Debonair* talks to the designer at his KASA gallery and workshop.

【 START 】

My design career started very recently.

It started almost four years ago, but my interest in the subject dates back much further, to when I attended the American University in Dubai in 1998. I started with an interior design degree but switched to business, which was a savvy move - I thought about it commercially and thought maybe interior design wasn't a great choice at the time, especially as Dubai wasn't flourishing then in the same way it is now, or as design-focused. I switched to Management & Business Administration in order to secure myself an income and then finished my degree in interior design whilst starting work in the marketing & communication industry and stayed there for almost eight years, until 2009.

The financial crisis in 2009 was an opportunity for me to quit.

I decided to make the switch and embark on a design career. During my course at university I realised that I wanted to focus on product design (in this case furniture) rather than pure interiors, but I didn't know where to start and didn't want to study for another four years, so I went Central St Martin's in London and then to the Centre for Fine Woodworking in New Zealand for two years. During my second year in New Zealand I set up my business both in Dubai and in Auckland - but in terms of a benchmark ▶



► as a design capital, Auckland and New Zealand wasn't really an active market for me, so I decided to focus all my resources here. In 2012, I moved back to Dubai and opened my studio and workshop in Ras Al Khor. After a year and a half, I added KASA as a gallery space.

My inspiration comes from many different sources. I'm very emotionally connected to things – when I was living abroad, it really affected me to be so far from my home, living in cities that weren't as cosmopolitan as Dubai. So at the time and even now when I design, I draw from my childhood memories, surroundings, the city of Dubai, various materials I'm looking at on a daily basis, or movements, such as Art Deco and Bauhaus. There is nearly always a story attached to every piece I design.

One of my most challenge pieces to design was a carom board. I made it during my study of marquetry and veneer after my first three months in New Zealand. I decided to carve an aerial shot of Dubai into a very large sized board. It was probably a tipping point for me as I began to wonder what I'd got myself into as it was an excruciating amount of work and a massive challenge to complete but I enjoyed every part of it - it is still one of my most emotional pieces.

My style has evolved. Of course, various things constantly influence me, whether it's things I read about or see or

experience - these are all parameters that shape my way, but my vision is constant. I have a mission to document design in the UAE - what are we doing now, how can we put design from the UAE in the forefront, defining and shaping the aesthetic of this city, we are a very open and cosmopolitan place and I assume that pieces will be bought by both locals and nationals.

One of my signature lines is the Palm line. We're about to add a lighting collection to it - it's one of the most appreciated lines, and we've used it in a lot of displays and installations. The way we use the palm trunk is really distinctive and even though the palm line is inspired by something organic, it's very structured. I think that what people feel when they see my design is a perception of my brand and the ways in which I've positioned it in the market. It takes time to define - sometimes it's through experimentation and trial that signature style evolves.

I want to take this brand to the next level by focusing on signature items, but we're going to move more into surfaces, so more into space design rather than just products. We're going to develop the brand experience but in particular this year, I want to introduce some new signature graphics so that when people see the items, there will be a more immediate recognition. There will be graphics that display our brand attributes, but I also want to experiment with texture, I want to engage all senses so the brand experience is a more immersive one. I'll also be working more on the quality and the craftsmanship of my pieces. I'm very young within the industry so I'm still evolving, learning and improving and I don't want to focus on products that are only influenced by culture. The new collection will be modern and fresh with an injection of colour. Currently, we don't use much, but we have plans to start using it.



[CAPTION]

above: one of Shafar's Telltale Designs - the 'illusion' dine chair.
opposite above: a glimpse of the Kasa gallery attached to Shafar's workshop in Ras Al Khor.
opposite below: the young designer photographed next to some of his designs on display at the Downtown Design Fair 2014.

[END]

