

DIVA



FEBRUARY 2012
10 AED

FALLING
IN LOVE
WITH **KELLY
RUTHERFORD**

RECONNECTING
WITH YOURSELF
THE RETREATS
FOR THE MIND,
BODY AND SOUL

**LIPSTICK
JUNGLE**

VAMPY POUTS
ARE MAKING A
COME BACK

HAIR
SPECIAL
THE COLORS,
THE TRENDS,
THE TRICKS

FABULOUS
STYLE

PIECES YOU'LL
WANT TO BUY
NOW

FOREVER FIT
BIGGEST LOSER
COACH **JILLIAN
MICHAELS**
SHARES
HER TIPS

MAN ABOUT TOWN KHALID SHAFAR

The dynamic furniture and objects designer discusses the art world, his Gulf heritage, and what his dreams are made of.

By Samantha Sery

En route to New Zealand, I had the pleasure of meeting the remarkable Khalid Shafar. Well, he was en route to New Zealand. I was in truth, at home, emailing Khalid from my Blackberry. But in reality, in one's wildest dreams, I imagine I'm in Khalid's keeping, meeting him halfway in a designer's paradise. A land between New Zealand and my isolated state, where tradition mindfully merges with great, modern aesthetic pleasures; his hometown, Dubai. His mood that day, "Relaxed. Which means I'll grab a nice coffee and surf a design book or magazine on my laptop." So, why not coffee and surf at The Lime Tree Cafe, Khalid's pick for the best breakfast in town. In my mind's eye, I imagine Khalid as a simply sharp dressed man, very casual cool in head-to-toe Armani. And he surely owns a tuxedo, also Armani, as every international man of design should. "I have a couple of pieces by Dior, Jil Sander, Vivienne Westwood, Balenciaga." Now we're talking. Khalid is a designer after all, that just so happens to ingeniously use traditional Arab garments in his work, like the Egaal and Talli. So the man can appreciate good design, when he sees it, and he knows it, be it a classically cubist Max Papart painting or a classic and crisp white button down. "I like to wear chic, elegant clothing, with a twist and unique element. I pick the impeccable designs."

Speaking of impeccable design, now we're talking Tom Ford. Khalid and I are both equally infatuated with the designer, the legend, the man; an espresso or two is therefore in order. Khalid calls the man an Inspirationalist, and why wouldn't he, "I am so inspired by his journey pre- and post- the launch of his own brand. He is a marketing genius with a very sophisticated positioning. And his lifestyle is something to admire. He is one very inspiring guru."

Other Inspirationalists that inspire Khalid in more ways than one, his tutors, famed designing Brazilian brothers, Fernando and Humberto Campana, and the emerging talent, Nika Zupanc, "She has a powerful story to tell, and this story is evolving with time." Stories. I'll learn soon enough that Khalid loves a good story, as each Khalid Shafar object has its origins in life stories. Each Khalid Shafar object has a tale to tell.

They may be functional, like my favorite, the PALM coat stand, inspired by the beautiful date palm giving trees that define the UAE skyline, a very ingenious object for hanging your objects. Or practical, like the ARABI space divider, another favorite, made from the traditional Egaal, elegantly and cleverly intermixed as a modern work of fashion and furniture here, all of which are designs that Khalid is loyally proud of. But each object has journeyed far and wide to come into its favorable own. "For my creations, I believe it's the 'tale' that is the aesthetic side of each object and what creates attachment to my pieces," Khalid tells me. "Whether you belong to the tale or not, you still react towards it when you see it, read about it, or hear it." Though Khalid's telling design aesthetic is difficult to ally with any one movement, there's a noticeably sleek minimalist effect in harmony with today's furnishing trends, each Khalid Shafar creation is absolutely a fluent expression of the designer's Gulf culture and one with Khalid's own, short story: "I am an Emirati designer by heart and origin."

Born and raised in Dubai, to an Emirati father and Egyptian mother, and many brothers and sisters, growing up, Khalid wanted to be a pilot. Soon the designer-to-be would develop a deep interest in art and design, taking an instant liking to his art classes. "I guess it was just before university that I realized that I wanted to be an interior designer." It wasn't until after graduating from the American University in Dubai with degrees in Business Management and Fine Arts, Interior Design, and after working in the marketing and communications field for some time, that Khalid finally pursued his



“ I THINK THE LACK OF A LONG DESIGN HISTORY IN THE REGION MADE ME THIRSTY TO EXPLORE THE HERITAGE OF MY OWN HOME AND PRESERVE SOME OF ITS CULTURE AND CRAFTS ”

design destiny. “I decided one day that I wanted to design a piece that would carry my name always. A close German friend of mine advised me to enroll in a full cabinet making/woodworking course. I found the course in Nelson, New Zealand, and here I am today. This created a new path in life for me,” Khalid recounts his design history, smiling.

Smiling. I learn soon enough that Khalid also loves to smile. Especially when he passionately talks shop, wood shop that is. “I feel like I have an affinity with timber, even though I come from a place with more desert sand than trees. As a medium, it has a reaction from the moment you cut it. When I finish a piece and oil it, it’s not the end. It’s alive, it moves. It’s something to take care of,” says Khalid, as he cleverly weaves his story with wood, smiling.

And if he wasn’t masterfully reworking woodworking, Khalid would be an architect. “Don’t ask me how and when, I will figure it out,” he confesses, and we’re all smiles.

Smiling, Khalid also confesses his greatest influence, “My lifestyle, the city I grew up in, my life memories. A designer is always sensitive to the beauty of things around him, and for me I find inspiration in many things. I take the beautiful side of all things around me.” Soon, Khalid will be back in his beautiful city of inspirations as Art Week is fast approaching. As a designer, collector, and art aficionado, Khalid eagerly anticipates Design Days Dubai most. “Finally an event that I belong to 100%. I’ll be showcasing a new lighting object through the Carwan Gallery’s ‘Design and New Perspectives in Middle Eastern Crafts’ exhibition.” Khalid will be one of eight international designers commissioned to design an object that reflects Middle East design, through uniquely contemporary tendencies. Khalid will also participate as a jury member for this year’s edition of the DXB Store, looking forward to and for those strong and innovative proposals and ideas submitted by some of the UAE’s most talented designers.

Although I’ve only recently met Khalid, one of the UAE’s most talented designers, and in total absentia too, I know this much is true: In my fantasy our meeting would be brilliant, and in actuality, though seas away, it was. Khalid’s telling tale continues, and will tell you so....

What can we expect from the next Khalid Shafar collection?

It’s too early to talk about the next collection now. We are just at the start of 2012 and I only recently launched my first collection.



I have couple of design directions and themes that I am exploring at the moment. I can see fabric and soft furnishing coming into my next collection. We are very fortunate not to be tight with seasons like fashion designers so we have plenty of time to experiment.

Tell me more about your relationship with New Zealand.

We are on good terms so far and I believe it will be a long term relationship. It started in 2009 with a short trip to Auckland for a visit and I found myself living in Nelson for a full year, only a year later. At first it was a shocking disappointment. But it turned to be a great affair after all. At this stage in my life, I consider New Zealand my second home. I spend almost half of the year here and the other half in Dubai. It’s always a nice feeling to be back in New Zealand. It’s my design studio, where I escape and my creative juices start to blend.

What makes working from Dubai different?

Dubai is my first home, where my family, friends and social life live. It’s definitely where my energy store is too. Working from Dubai is more physical for me. I am more established there and have my resources around to transfer my ideas into reality and play around with materials. I always thought if I had to think about the best city, where my inspirations come from that it would not be Dubai. However, living away from Dubai for a while made Dubai the best city and environment for me to draw from. I think the lack of a long design history in the region made me thirsty to explore the heritage of my own home and preserve some of its culture and crafts.

I’m very impressed with the way that contemporary art and design is being received in the UAE, and the greater Middle East. Why do you think this is?

For many reasons. There is a great cosmopolitan crowd in the UAE that is always in demand. The different movements in the region, political, cultural or economical, inspire artists to express many different topics through their work.

What’s your biggest criticism of the current state of contemporary art and design in the UAE?

I think am quite happy with the state of art in the country. In the past 15 years there have been good initiatives and movements in this field and today we have some of the best platforms for art like Art Dubai and Abu Dhabi Art. However, regarding design in the UAE, we are still very immature in terms of a design community. Although we have a very potential market for designers here in the UAE, the supply of local talents and designers is very small to serve this market. Therefore the favor shifts to international brands. There is potential here and designers can create good work here. They need to find their potential though, and follow their passion with what they have at hand.

What clientele do your designs serve?

My objects are produced per order and some are limited edition, so my target client is one who is design savvy, looking for unique objects, appreciates designer pieces and designers, and that believe in my design ethos.

What is your favorite object at home?

That is a very tough question for a designer, but I’ll play it safe and answer with, DUBAI JOURNEY – the Carrom game board. I am emotionally attached to this piece, as it was game I used to play as a child. I made this piece in the first three months after I moved

to New Zealand. I was very homesick being that it was my first move out of my country, and making this piece was a tribute to my hometown. It is a designer’s piece.

Do you have any favorite furniture and objects designers? Artists?

From the design cluster, the courageous Campana Brothers, the emperors Philip Starck and Karim Rashid, and the creative story teller designer of the ‘Unfaithful Woman’ Tale, Nika Zupanc. Artists are different deal. I have many works from one of the masters, Max Papart. I also collect some Middle Eastern artists like Rashid Quraishi and Chant Avedissian.

And what did you learn from your courageous tutors, Fernando and Humberto Campana?

To be courageous, and daring and experiment with materials and colors. Don’t be afraid to try new things. Part of innovation is the new, the first time.

Has working with the Campana brothers been a defining moment thus far?

The crown of it all was definitely my trip to Sao Paulo and spending a week in the Campana studio. It was an excellent experience for me and a dream come true as an emerging designer. This experience made me realize my potential in design by taking the Campana brothers as my benchmark in their incredible approach to design, experimentation with materials, and in their business and brand growth. Another defining moment was the selection of the ARABI space divider as part of the Carwan Gallery exhibition in Berlin at the Qubique Design Fair. Recently, my visit to Tokyo and participation in Tokyo Designers Week 2011 where I launched my 2012 collection as a part of the Dubai Futures event was another great highlight to add to the list.

It seems like many of your dreams are dreams come true. What else do you dream about?

I have many dreams; personal and professional. An individual can’t live with only one dream. The minute the dream comes true, then what’s next? I dream about the day when I open my first flagship store, the day I reach 100 different designs in my portfolio, the day I have an object of mine being mass produced, the day I receive my first international design award for one of my designs, the day I launch my first book about ‘Designs from the UAE’, the day we will have a Design Museum here in UAE. And plenty more dreams to come.

I assume dinner with Tom Ford would be a dream come true. Have you ever met this Inspirationalist?

You are correct in your guessing. It would be dinner with Tom Ford. I never met him. I have many questions for this man.

What’s the best advice you’ve ever received?

It was very recent from someone I barely know. I was at a gathering with friends, and a friend of a friend complimented me on my recent solo exhibition at The Pavilion. I expressed my anxiety about my next collection and how all the positive feedback had put pressure on me to challenge myself to come up with a better one next time. She stopped me and said, “Khalid, your first collection is excellent. So keep this quality of work and standard in mind and forget time and quantity,” which relieved me and removed that pressure.

And the best advice that you can give?

Think global and act global. Although we come from a region that lacks the long design history, this shouldn’t stop us from using the little we have on hand to create and innovate. Keep designing to define your style and push hard to position yourself out there in the design world with your work and design ideas. Show the world that this region has great designers with international qualities.■

For more go to www.khalidshafar.co.nz

HOMETOWN GLORIES, AND BEYOND

Khalid singles out his favorite discoveries at home, and abroad...

Albergo Hotel Beirut, Lebanon

Experience the Ottoman Era in this hotel’s uniquely Turkish interior.

Six Senses

Ziggy Bay, Oman

Live the old Gulf life with a five-star setting.

ZUMA

Dubai

Food and atmosphere never a grade below A+ at this place.

Eggs’n Things

Tokyo, Japan

You may wait on queue for three hours to get a seat, but you’ll see why it’s well worth the wait.

Heritage & Diving Villages

Dubai

The best place to sit and listen to the real stories and experiences of the UAE in the past.

Souq Waqif

Doha, Qatar

Fifteen years of my life memories took place in this Souq, and I just can’t get enough.

High Tea in Orbit

SKYCITY, Auckland, New Zealand

The best scones. The best view of Auckland, and one very good tea hour.

WOW Museum

Nelson, New Zealand

You will say WOW when you see the creative and fashionable display.

The Pavilion

Downtown Dubai

A great creative venue where you can spend a productive time among creative thinkers.



Six Senses Ziggy Bay, Oman