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SCENTS & SENTIMENTS



Objects of his affection

The *Arabi* screen looks to the traditional dress for inspiration, the *Dubai Journey* game board was produced as a tribute to a hometown. Meet Khalid Shafar, an up-and-coming Emirati furniture designer who splits his time between the UAE and New Zealand. His contemporary, delightfully quirky – yet always functional – creations have stories to tell of the country's oft-forgotten history, so now's the time to listen up.

What do you like best about life in Dubai?

There is a great energy and buzz here generated by its cosmopolitan community. It might seem very business-oriented, but there's also a great social aspect. Dubai is a young, organised city with great services that make visiting or living here a pleasant and surprising experience. For me, the safety and hospitality are incomparable to any other city in the world.

Favourite places to visit in the city?

For a designer who seeks a lot of inspiration from the country's heritage and culture, the Dubai Museum and the Heritage & Diving Village are my favourite spots. I just feel happy to be there, it takes me back to the 80s. Of course, I just adore the Burj Khalifa area. I admire its architecture story and design, and how the iconic tower is illuminated.

In your opinion, what is the biggest misconception about Dubai?

That it is a superficial city, not genuine in content or context. The naysayers believe that Dubai is a city that only cares about breaking records in terms of the biggest, the best, the tallest and it has no story to tell. There is so much history here... unfortunately it got lost in the hype!

If I had to make the move to New Zealand permanent and could carry only one memento of my heritage, it would be *Bukhoor*, the Arabic incense. The smell always reminds me of home and my beloved family, and it takes me back to my childhood. I think it's because of how strong the sense of smell is for human beings.

What is the single biggest difference between life in New Zealand and the UAE?

Definitely the landscape! I am living between a golden sandpit and a green haven.

Favourite travel destination?

Beirut. It combines everything I need in a destination: nice weather, delicious food, good friends and most importantly, the wonderful mix of art and design between the pre- and post-war era.

How do you explore a new city?

I jump to 'online search' first before travelling to define locations, restaurants and cafes to visit. Then comes walking as for me, it's the best way to discover any city's inner beauty. I had this experience in São Paulo and walking was truly the best means to explore it.

What have your world travels taught you?

How to communicate and understand other cultures. It also opened my horizons to accept change and diversity. It made me very independent and more appreciative of what I have in my home country.

What are your main influences when conceiving a piece of work?

The inspiration and the story it tells. It's the story that develops the attachment between me and a particular piece of work. In my design process, creativity, practicality and functionality are my main pillars.

How does dividing your time between Dubai and Auckland impact your viewpoint as a designer?

Living between both cultures makes me understand and adapt to both communities' views on design. The differences and parallels create a great source of inspiration and it reflects well on the design story and materials I use!

Best city to get your creative juices flowing?

I never thought the answer to this would be Dubai! However, living away for a while made this city the best environment for me to create in. I think the lack of a long design history in the region made me thirsty to explore its heritage and preserve some of its culture and crafts. dv