

# Bazaar

Harper's

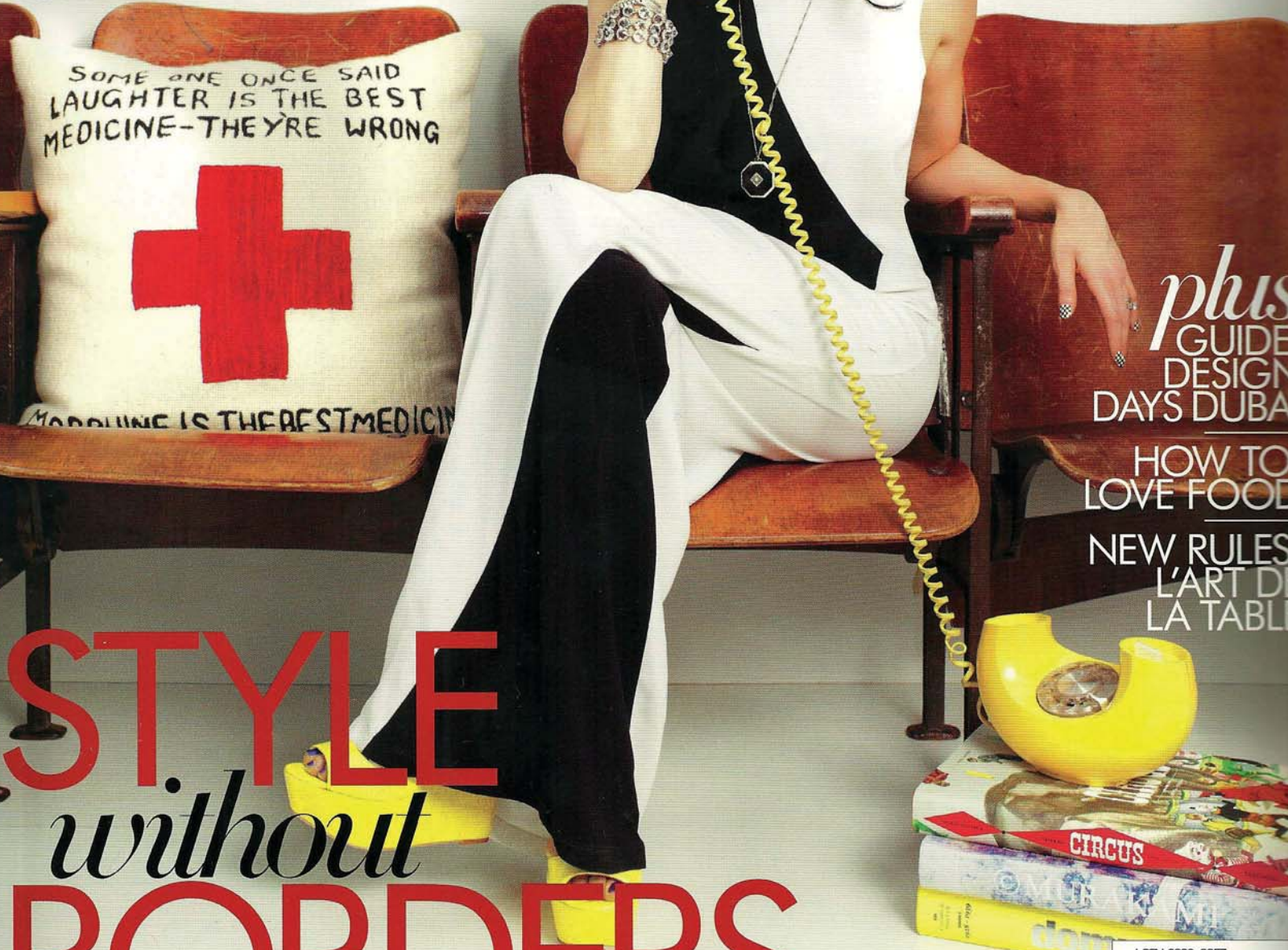
ARABIA

## INTERIORS

*Crazy*  
ABOUT  
*colour*

STACEY BENDET'S NEW YORK  
LOFT IS OFF THE CHART

2012's  
HOTTEST  
DECOR  
TRENDS



STYLE  
*without*  
BORDERS

BOLD, BRIGHT, BEAUTIFUL HOMES

*plus*  
GUIDE:  
DESIGN  
DAYS DUBAI

HOW TO:  
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NEW RULES:  
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# home SCHOOL

Rue Kothari meets **KHALID SHAFAR**, the Emirati product designer with a plan for global dominance

**W**ho is Khalid Shafar?" I asked his enthusiastic public relations man on the phone. It wasn't that I hadn't heard the name before, quite the opposite. It was in fact, the only name I'd been hearing on my bordering-on-obsessive search for emerging talent in the region. "He's a one-man PR machine," somebody had whispered from behind their hand. "Khalid's the only Emirati designer producing original pieces," came another statement from some erudite academic. It seems that both of those aren't far from the truth. Appearing as part of the exhibition by Beirut's Carwan Gallery, 31-year-old Khalid is single-handedly flying the UAE flag for authentic product design. It was enough incentive for one *Bazaar Interiors* editor, to don some sensible shoes and head for the wilds of Ras Al Khor, the Dubai industrial estate harbouring a man who's deadly serious about design.

Shafar's workshop is in the grounds of his family's construction company; giving him the space and resources he needs to work when he travels back from his adopted home in New Zealand. The space, filled with industrial machinery and slabs of wood, is busy with Indian men in blue overalls, all milling about in the dusty light, tinkering with different prototypes. One stool is in its raw state, modeled to the structure of a palm tree, another - a wooden chair with his signature rope weave - a work in progress. "My heroes are the Campana Brothers," he tells me. "I went to San Paulo as part of a cultural exchange program, and worked with them to create an original installation. We made cardboard mashrabiya, representing the material of the barrios with an ancient eastern technique, innovatively laying the pieces on the floor like tiles, lit from beneath."

He was so inspired by the experience that it continues to inform his style. "I saw how they used local material to create locally relevant work and I want to do more of this," he says. "I also want to encourage other young designers, to tell them not to be discouraged if the elements don't exist yet in the UAE to create the piece they want; to look around and see what can be turned into great design. One thing I've learned is that here you need to push. Push to get the design courses you want, push to find a factory who'll make your work, push to get support from institutions. The framework isn't there yet, and those resources won't come to you."

His motto is think global, act global. Like most of the talent that begins in the region, he is committed to creating work with international appeal, to launching his



*KHALID SHAFAR  
in his Ras Al Khor  
workshop*

*SIGNATURE  
PIECES Khalid's  
Illusion chair and  
'T' light*



talents in the wider market and get crucial recognition both critically and financially. "I know that there is a benefit to being an Emirati designer. You have so much help from the community and people are genuinely interested in what you do. But it was hard at the beginning. People thought that interior design was a feminine profession. There was this misconception, a confusion between interior design and decorating. What I do is primarily a tough, physical, practical thing - I'm making objects from scratch. I don't know any other male Emirati who's doing this. Believe me, I've looked."

With an Interior Design degree from the American University in Dubai, his passion for furniture design led him to a Cabinet Making course at the Centre for Fine Woodworking in Nelson; a beautiful, little town in the South Island of New Zealand that is home to the country's crafts, arts and culture. Just a year later, he launched his first official collection.

Shafar now resides in both continents, flying between the two polarities, carrying a unique perspective on the world. He sees the launch of Design Days Dubai as a first step in the right direction. "Design Days Dubai will help to build a strong base for design in the region. I can see it becoming the hub of design launches and a gathering point for the creative movement in the region."

Confirmed poster boy for this new design-savvy generation, Khalid's profile is rising; with coverage in respected international journals and magazines, gaining momentum from the successful appearances at all the right design fairs. "There are lots of challenges facing designers here," he muses. "Education, resources, support, information - none of it is readily available. But, that doesn't mean it's not possible. Eventually, I want people to look at me as a design reference in the region and be inspired to take on that challenge."