

SPECIAL FEATURE
Everyday Dining

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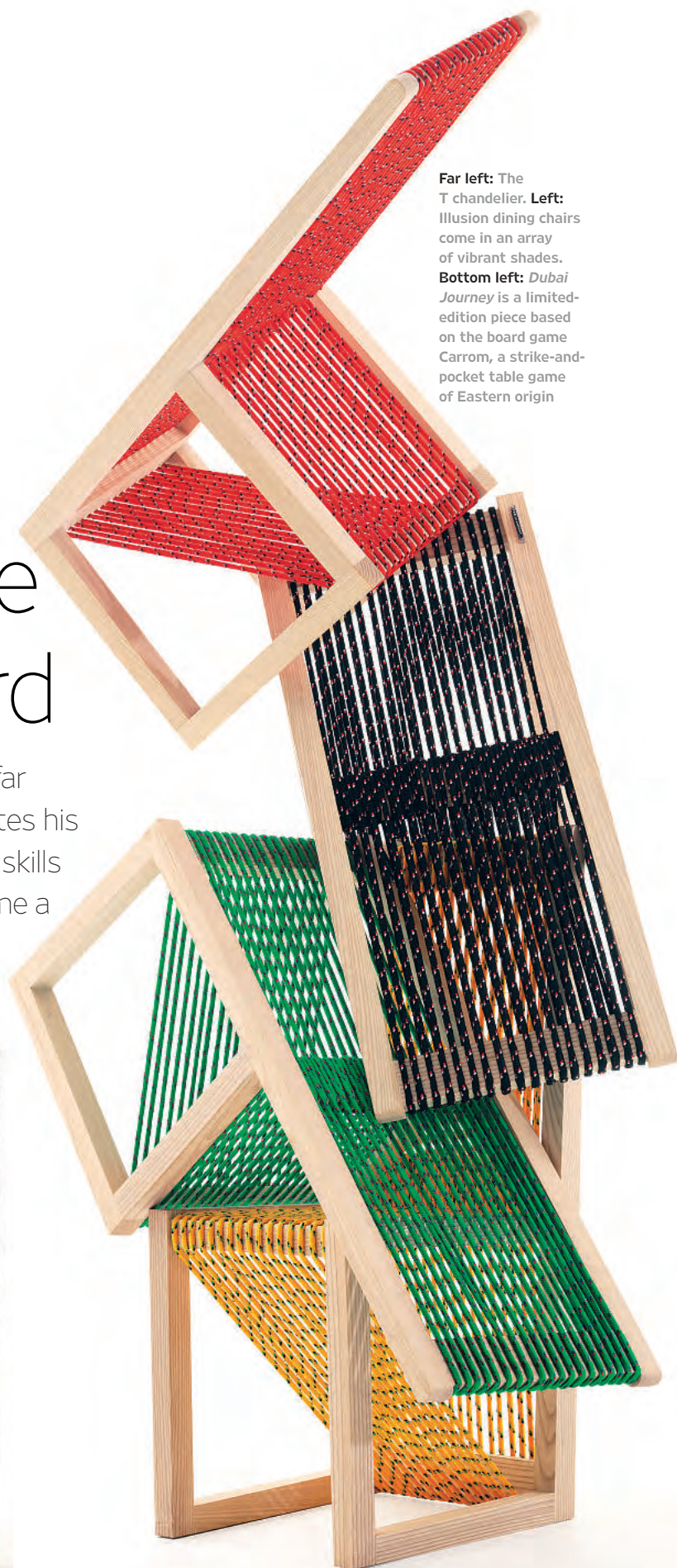


Far left: The T chandelier. **Left:** Illusion dining chairs come in an array of vibrant shades. **Bottom left:** *Dubai Journey* is a limited-edition piece based on the board game Carrom, a strike-and-pocket table game of Eastern origin

Tales from the Drawing Board

Charismatic Emirati designer Khalid Shafar chats to *InsideOut* about how he translates his life stories into furniture using traditional skills and materials, and how he aims to become a reference for UAE design

Words: Angela Boshoff Hundal, Pictures: Dennis B Mallari and supplied





believe that... all great objects are borne of stories and in turn, create their own. I make pieces that tell tales and are linked to memories, experiences or places.

One of the first pieces I ever made was... the Illusion stool. I created it while living in Nelson, New Zealand where I was studying at the time. New Zealand was my first move after living in Dubai for 30 years and the slower pace of life made me homesick. The Illusion stool is crafted from ash wood and Danish rope, and reflects the movement, energy and cosmopolitan nature of the city that I missed. The structured yet sculptural lines remind me of highway light trails one captures in photographs taken with a long exposure. When you sit down, the tension across the stool is equally divided, which can be seen as a metaphor for any big city.

My childhood memories are a great source of inspiration... My palm stool, coat stand and coffee table designs ▶

Left: Khalid Shafar in his studio.

Below: Khalid's Palm coat stand was inspired by a childhood memory



Above: The limited-edition Arabi chandelier.

Below: The Illusion armchair is a smart, contemporary piece that oozes design appeal





Khalid says his studio, a minimalist yet tactile industrial space in Dubai, allows his designs to take centre stage



Above and below: The Little Palm stool and Palm coffee table are made of palm wood and handwoven palm leaves



Top: The Arabi table lamp is inspired by the traditional Arabian oil lamp.
Bottom: The Crate coffee table can be displayed as seen here, or folded up into a box shape



are inspired by palm trees and were influenced by my memories of them as a child. I remember growing up, people would hang things – plastic bags, items of clothing, anything – on the trunks of palm trees. What always struck me was that they didn't use the fronds, but the body. The use of the trunk as a functional item inspired my Palm coat stand, which is a beautiful design that's also functional. After the coat stand, I created the Little Palm stool, which has a similar body and a hand-woven palm-leaf seat covering crafted by Emirati women. The coffee table features palm-leaf mats woven into the wood.

The first time I used an item of clothing to make furniture was... in March 2011. I was invited to the Tasmeem Doha 2011 conference in Qatar as a guest speaker, and three other Arab designers and myself were asked to do an experimental design based on the theme 'link'. We were then asked to showcase the result of these experiments in front of an audience over four days. For me, the word 'link' represents a circle, which is essentially a shape that is created by joining the two ends of a line. When the circle came to mind, I thought that the egal – an adjustable headband used by Emirati

men to hold a smagh (head cover) in place – would make a great material from which to create furniture due to its stiffness and texture. The end result was the Arabi space divider that links the circles of the egals together. I used 81 egals for this piece and while they are already quite sturdy, I had to use wooden rods and hinges to make sure the divider stood up. The experiment was a massive success and revealed how important it is for me to use a variety of materials when creating new designs.

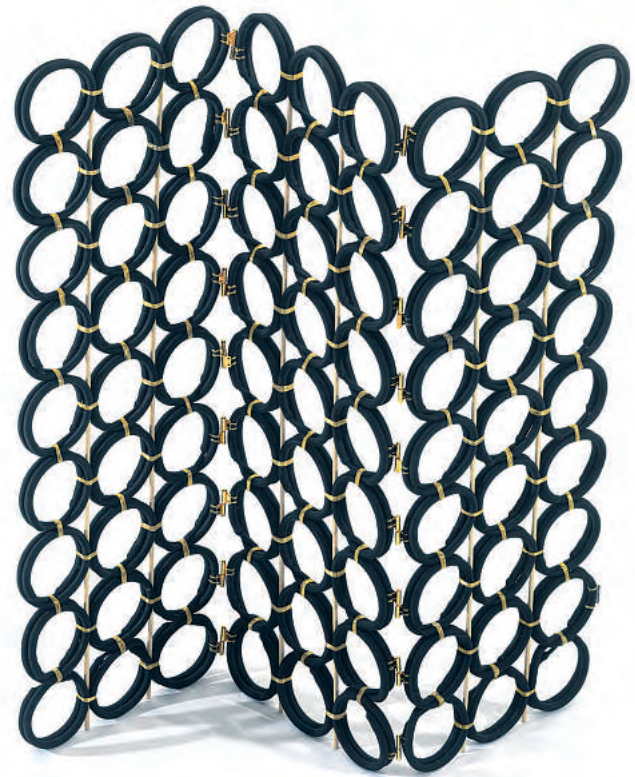
One of my roles as a designer is... to preserve the memory of traditional handicrafts. While I can't necessarily prevent their extinction, I believe that I can prevent their story from fading. My T chandelier, for example, is inspired by the tools that older local women use to do talli, an Emirati style of embroidery. The traditional tools are made up of a small stand topped with cushions. The



weaving thread or rope is placed on top of the cushions and the women cross weave on top of that. To create a similar aesthetic for my T chandelier, I folded a mattress that represented the cushion, and suspended the lights, which represent the threads, from that.

The Emirati culture has so much to offer... and there are many facets of it that I haven't explored yet. My last collection was divided into two lines; cultural and contemporary. I wanted to see what appealed to people, and the results were surprising. I found that local people were more into contemporary pieces while Westerners leaned more towards the cultural ones.

I am very proud to be... an Emirati designer. I don't know if I am the only local furniture designer, but I know that I am at least one of few. My vision is to become a reference for UAE design. When I read design publications I always see Brazilian, Scandinavian or Danish design, but never Emirati design. The Middle East has produced amazing designers, including Karim Rashid and Nada Debs, but when international clients, designers and media come to the UAE, I want to be one of the names that define Emirati design. ■



Above: The Arabi space divider is made of 81 egals, brass wire, hinges and wooden rods. **Below:** Colours is the name of this playful wall cabinet, crafted using large colouring pencils, ash, beech, scraps of cedar, walnut and rosewood

