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Dubai-based designer Khalid Shafar is leading the way in forging a contemporary design identity for the UAE.

Industrial design is a rapidly emerging field in the UAE – recently established design fairs, such as Design Days Dubai and Downtown Design, are booming. Ground has been broken on d3, a gargantuan design district that will provide exhibition, retail and studio space to the creative industries. And industrial design courses have begun to be offered at the American University in Sharjah, giving rise to the first generation of locally trained designers.

At the heart of this burgeoning scene is Khalid Shafar, the first industrial designer to practise professionally in the Emirates and a passionate advocate for the education of young designers and the development of a local aesthetic.

“We are in a society here that is largely uneducated about industrial design,” says the Dubai-based designer. “We need to move through that and educate people. Local designers need to produce work and begin to define a style.”

But what is that style? Shafar’s portfolio, which offers the best representation of the emerging contemporary identity for design in the UAE, shows use of local materials, such as leather, forms that subtly reference the Middle East, and crafted details inspired by Dubai’s artisanal heritage. Yet, far from re-hashing the traditions of the UAE, Shafar’s work offers a genuinely new interpretation.

“When you look at the work of Khalid Shafar, it is very strongly anchored to the culture here,” says the Director of



WORDS MANDI KEIGHRAN

Design Days Dubai, Cyril Zammit. "This is important as it finally gives a contemporary approach to something that has been repeated for several centuries."

Unsurprisingly, Shafar followed an unusual career path to get where he is today. Although interested in design, he didn't feel it was a viable career in Dubai at the time, and so instead studied business, followed by interior design. Then, until 2009, he worked in marketing and communications for an investment group. When the bubble burst in Dubai, Shafar followed his design dreams and enrolled in a furniture design course in New Zealand. There, he learnt to work with timber, and developed an approach to design that is firmly rooted in making.

On returning to Dubai in 2011 – just before the launch of Design Days Dubai – he established a studio and workshop at the site of his family's construction business. A year later, after some early success, he made the decision to launch an exhibition space, KASA, adjacent to his studio.

"I want KASA to be a place where designers, press and interested public can



OPPOSITE 'Zoo' shelving unit, 2013

TOP 'Illusion' stool, 2010

ABOVE 'The Palm' coffee table, 2011



ABOVE Coat stand from the 'Shadow' series

visit to see what kind of design aesthetic can be linked to the Emirates," he says of the venture.

Although only just heading into his fifth year of working as a practising designer, Shafar's success is clear. He has collaborated with the Campana brothers on an installation for Abu Dhabi Art, released a collection of rugs with Tai Ping, has exhibited in the UAE, Tokyo, Paris, Berlin and Milan, and has recently become a brand ambassador for Khie's.

This successful model of entrepreneurship is something Shafar is keen to encourage the newly emerging generation of Emirati design graduates to adopt. "A lot of emerging talent keeps design as a hobby, rather than a career," he says. "It's important to give examples of how you can take it from a passion to a career."

"I was brought back to Dubai by the sense of movement," he continues. "I am a local designer, and I don't want to see the design fairs here filled with only international work. The general level of our local design is not yet mature – that is quickly changing, but it needs strong voices to talk about it and show work."

Mandi Keighran is Editor-at-large for Indesign, based in London.



KHALID SHAFAR

WHO Khalid Shafar

BORN Dubai

LIVES Dubai

WORKS Own studio opened 2011

BACKGROUND Trained Dubai, London, New Zealand

khalidshafar.com