

# etihadinflight

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# In the Capital



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# Design for life

KHALID SHAFAR, THE UAE'S PIONEERING FURNITURE DESIGNER, EXPLAINS HOW HE INFUSES OBJECTS WITH STORIES TO CREATE A NEW DESIGN HOUSE WORTH TALKING ABOUT

WORDS | KATHRYN CLARK

“**E**mirati designers speak out!” This is the call from Emirati design talent Khalid Shafar, as his one-year-old brand KHALID SHAFAR prepares to go global.

Whilst the UAE has been carefully fostering its fledgling art scene, Khalid laments that the same support has not been extended to local designers. “There is a difference between art and design. I might even be the first Emirati designer,” he wonders, “I just don’t know; people aren’t getting their work out there.”

If the quality of Khalid’s work is any indication, the UAE’s designers are worthy of the spotlight. Khalid’s idea is that objects should tell stories. His first collection, positioned as Telltale Objects, features six groundbreaking pieces of furniture that go beyond design, and would hold their own at any international trade fair.

Gemini is a striking example. An elmwood chair with possum fur upholstery, the back of the chair can be folded down into a table top. Khalid’s sisters are both Gemini and he was interested in exploring how two women born

under the same star sign could be so different. Gemini’s two functions – table and chair – represent the two identities of his sisters. Practically, Gemini addresses the space limitations many people face in their homes.

“A good object should be creative, practical and functional,” says the designer who counts Philippe Starck, Tom Ford, and Nika Zupanc among his inspirations. “A piece can serve more than one purpose – this is the practicality of design. A chair is the most challenging piece of furniture to design – a lot of effort goes into the design process. Gemini is very special. I’m honoured to see my name on this piece.”

Although KHALID SHAFAR was established in New Zealand, the 30-year-old’s story begins in the UAE. Whilst he always had a passion for art and design, Khalid spent seven years in marketing and communications in the UAE before enrolling at London’s Central Saint Martins where he took a course under the furniture master Rock Galpin. Khalid’s time in London proved critical. “Rock transferred his personal experiences to us, and answered many important questions,” Khalid says. “For example, what should you do if you are about to release a piece and you realise that someone else has already done the same thing? He said ‘You can release it, and risk your reputation, or you can move on to another idea’. This was so inspiring – if I feel down, it helps me move on.”

After finishing at Central Saint Martins, Khalid moved to the tiny town of Nelson in New Zealand to study furniture making. “Nelson was a big move,” says Khalid, “I felt so relaxed there, due to the people, the nature, the atmosphere of the place. But it was a huge shock as I have always lived in cities. I came to adore the convenience in Nelson – it’s a hub of art and culture, and most of New Zealand’s artists have their roots there.”



When Khalid began to feel homesick, he channelled this feeling into making an exquisite Carrom game board. Imagery of Arabic calligraphy, camels, desert scenes and the UAE flag tells of the Bedouin history of the UAE. “Emotionally, I’m very attached to that game board,” he says. “Every piece represents my country. Emiratis don’t really move away from their families until they are married, and I was thinking that 29 was very old to move so far away. It was a huge decision.”

In December 2010, at his school’s annual exhibition, Khalid exhibited his work for the first time. “It was a challenge to face Kiwis with my designs, inspired by my life and experiences and country,” says Khalid. “But the compliments and positive feedback were so encouraging. It proved that after a year of furniture making, the design side in me was still alive.”

So what does the future hold? “I want to explore stories beyond my own life,” he says, explaining that he is moving to Auckland. “I want to look at nature, social relationships and other countries. New Zealand will be an inspiration! I want to explore other materials, as most of my work has been with timber.”

Despite his international outlook, Khalid’s heart remains with the UAE, where he will eventually open his flagship store. Khalid also hopes that his story will entice local designers out of the shadows and make the country a design capital worth talking about. ☺

