

A close-up portrait of a woman wearing a large, vibrant butterfly mask with orange, black, and white patterns. She is also wearing a green and blue peacock feather collar. The background is dark, making the colors of her costume stand out.

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# *Designer Distinction*

THE IMPORTANCE  
OF BEING  
MANISH ARORA:  
THE INDIAN  
FASHION GURU'S  
GLOBAL SUCCESS

**+** BETWEEN THE LINES  
WITH RUSKIN BOND

PLANET MOM  
THE MILLION-  
DOLLAR QUESTION

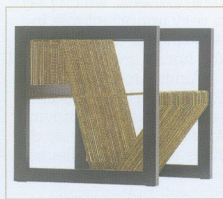
COMMUNITY  
PEEK INTO AN  
EMIRATI VILLA

TRAVEL  
SOUK SOAK  
IN MARRAKECH

# BACK TO HIS ROOTS, BY DESIGN

KHALID SHAFAR  
CREATES HOUSEHOLD  
ARTIFACTS THAT  
BORROW FROM THE  
UAE'S RICH — BUT  
OFTEN FORGOTTEN —  
PAST. AND HE ENSURES  
THAT HIS ARTISTIC  
PIECES ARE ALWAYS  
PRACTICAL AND USEFUL

BY MEGHA PAI



HOME-GROWN:  
Khalid Shafar  
with his carom  
board, Dubai  
Journey. Photos:  
Khalid Shafar/  
The Pavilion,  
Downtown Dubai

**A**RTISTS, BASKING in their freedom of expression, do whatever they want with their art. Design, on the other hand, is more considerate. The moment it loses functionality it ceases to be a design. Simply put, in the words of graphic designer and illustrator, Frank Chimero, people ignore design that ignores people.

These days, more and more designers are blurring the line between art and design, seeking a symbiotic relationship. Khalid Shafar is one of them.

The Emirati's passion for art and design began quite early on in life but they weren't his first career choice. After working in marketing and communication for almost seven years though, he decided to take a leap of faith and in 2008, moved to New Zealand to pursue a future in furniture design. Today he owns a namesake brand — Khalid Shafar — with designs that are modern in purpose, but borrow greatly from elements from the past, creating a unique fusion that depicts vignettes of life circa pre and post-modernisation of the UAE.

"Each of my designs is part of a story, a tale of my experiences, a treasure trove of my memories. My pieces are an extension of my personality; they reflect my lifestyle and journey to date." And a great journey it has been so far. Besides shuttling between his homes in Dubai and New Zealand, Khalid spends time travelling across the world to present his annual collections at international exhibitions and design forums. A permanent space is also on the cards and he is in talks with several retail outlets to showcase his creations in the Middle East. For now, his work is on display till February 4 at Gallery 1 at The Pavillion in Downtown Dubai.

"With furniture design, we are still nascent. We are aware of it. We look

around, but do not find many people producing pieces for this part of the world," says the designer, adding that more needs to be done to raise awareness among consumers as well. "People do not know or perhaps don't have the means to experiment with the furniture they own. Design, much like art, can be a good investment and an expression of the collector's personality."

An ideal customer, according to Khalid, is one who is "design savvy, knows what he or she wants and wishes to create a story rather than fill up space."

As "probably one of the first furniture designers from the country", Khalid is excited about the opportunity to build a new legacy. "Whenever there is no reference point, there is a hope to start something new. We can decide whether we want to follow the already existing Arabic, Moorish or Islamic style or if we're going to create our own style."

The UAE has achieved a lot in a short period, he feels. "People are impressed by our country, our achievements and the things that we have built. But we don't want to only be known as people who have built big buildings or have the latest, the biggest or the newest. We want to be able to say that we have history and culture, that we can be good in design and art — and that we can present work of international standards."

Belonging to the "transitional" generation has its own set of challenges, he says. The task is to create a bridge between the old and the new. "Today's generation cannot imagine the simpler life of the earlier days. We need to find ways of telling them these stories and transferring our history to them too."

Khalid's work does precisely that. For example, 40 years ago, Emiratis used to eat while sitting on mats

called *sarroods*, he says.

The tradition is slowly dying but by transposing the design onto a utilitarian coffee table, he is trying to "save" the tradition. "When people buy my work, they will talk about the inspiration behind the piece and tell the story. Then I will have achieved my purpose," he says.

One of his favourite pieces called Dubai Journey — designed on the carom game board — came about as a result of his homesickness during his early days in New Zealand. "It is a tribute to the many wonderful hours I spent playing carom as a child with my friends and family. The piece represents the journey that travellers took to reach Dubai." In the centre of the board is an Arabic calligraphic description that reads: "Dubai dar el hay", which means Dubai is the home for lively people. Camels can be seen travelling towards the oasis at the centre of the board. The UAE flag decorates the players' four baselines and the entire board is framed with teak — the same timber that is still used to build dhows in the UAE.

Khalid's attempt to blend the past and present stems from his longing for the old. "Your nostalgia is like your roots. You cannot and shouldn't disconnect from that. Without your roots you don't belong anywhere."

As Emiratis, he says, "We have been provided with everything — good education, housing, employment and every other security. There is no excuse for me not to give back to my country."

What better way than by representing the UAE with a body of work that is recognised internationally?

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**INSPIRED ART:** Pieces from Khalid's 2012 collection, The Inspirationalists

