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WORLD CLASS

From a polo event in Auckland New Zealand, to Design Week in Milan Italy, globe-trotting Khalid Shafar is emerging as a Kiwi based designer with an international reputation for impeccable transformations.

His diary this year would make James Bond envious: February, mingle with polo superstars in Auckland for the New Zealand Open; March, to Qatar for a design conference alongside the Arab world's elite designers; April, join the chic throngs at Milan Design Week.

He was recently in Sao Paulo, Brazil, to collaborate with the Campana brothers at their famed design studio.

He splits his time between Dubai, his native city rising ever-higher out of scorching desert sands, and an apartment overlooking Auckland's Viaduct basin. He also owns a property in Beirut, recovering from war to reclaim its title of 'Paris of the Middle East'. Khalid Shafar is a 30-year-old of intriguing contrasts, who left behind a burgeoning business career to get a fine arts degree and become an emerging international designer of sophisticated and sleek bespoke furniture and objects; who swapped the colossal high-rises and high-life of Dubai to learn from master woodworkers in comparatively sleepy Nelson.



Shafar wears impeccably stylish clothing by Gucci and Hermes, and a luxury Swiss watch by Chopard – in muted tones without a label in sight. His favourite leisure activity is long meals with friends at fine dining restaurants, yet he fasts for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Shafar also switches effortlessly between Arabic and English.

Even his elegant 'Gemini' chair is an intriguing juxtaposition – Kiwi possum fur transformed into stylish upholstery over pale elm. A chameleon, it folds into a table.

Shafar believes the design community in the Middle East is not yet mature and praises the creative brains behind New Zealand fashion brands such as World and Zambesi – rating them as world-class. Equally, he believes this country's best residential architects are creating homes that rival the best globally.

He came to New Zealand intending to stay for the duration of the Nelson course and spend a further year in Auckland to explore the design market. If his business goes well, Auckland will become a more permanent base.

Shafar says being taken out of his comfort zone and into a different culture, climate and lifestyle has forced him to think and get inspired.

"I like the country. I like the people, the atmosphere, the architecture. There is a lot of charm in New Zealand."

His designs are a manifestation of his own stories and experience. They are a fusion of east and west, or as he puts it "a cultural exchange between United Arab Emirates and New Zealand", and have a tale to tell. Each piece is hand-crafted in New Zealand.

"I define 'Gemini' as a masculine piece, although its inspiration was derived from my two sisters. They are both Gemini star sign, but I wanted to explore why they have totally different personalities."

'Illusion', a stool made from ash wood and fine woven Danish rope, was inspired by life in Dubai: "I think it is good to give tribute to the place where you come from."

For someone from the desert, Shafar has an interesting affinity with timber: "Wood has a reaction from the moment you cut it. When you finish the piece and oil it, it is not the end. It is alive, it moves. It reacts towards heat, humidity and cool weather. It's something you take care of."

He plans to expand his mediums to plastic, metal, and glass in the future, but always with regard to three core principles: creativity, functionality and practicality.

"I don't want my objects to be perceived as a piece of sculpture or art. I don't want people to put them in a corner and not use them. I want them to enjoy the beauty of the piece, but also use it and trust it in their daily life."

When designing, he imagines where the piece will belong and fit, whether in an architecturally designed house, an elegant cocktail bar or hotel room, or perhaps even a Zambesi concept store.

He thinks New Zealand interiors lack a cutting edge: "I would call on New Zealand interior designers to be more

courageous with the way they put objects together. There are plenty of opportunities to be experimental in restaurants and bars. Then the public becomes the judge of the interior space."

His definition of personal style has changed at 30, leaving behind quirky to become more conservative and classic.

"What I dress in, where I go, how I walk and talk. These should reflect me as a person at my age, in my career, and my position in the community," he says.

He states that using possum fur on the 'Gemini' chair makes a statement about his wish to embrace Kiwi culture. Like most visitors, his familiarity with possums came via road kill. But his deeper interaction included satisfying himself that the use of their fur is justified, that their death keeps a balance in nature by allowing trees to live.

While he recognises Nelson's importance as an artistic hub, he says a move to Auckland was a natural progression once the course finished last year.

"Big city life is where my inspiration comes from. It's a vibrant life where I can see the modern and the classic. It is a mix of colours, a mix of lifestyles and people." 