

MASQUERADE

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ALL EYES ON THE REGION
A TALE OF TRADITION
BEHIND THE LENS
CULTURAL RESILIENCE



ILLUSION OF THE PEARL

By Nahda Suleiman

Khalid Shafar, an established name on the UAE design circuit, shares how he aims to preserve his heritage, by translating his childhood memories into contemporary furniture.

Nahda Suleiman reports



the beauty of their environment. In my work, I take the beautiful side of things around me, and translate them into my objects,' shares Shafar.

For the third edition of Design Days Dubai (DDD), the region's leading design fair which took place this March, Shafar collaborated with the Lebanese-based Carwan Gallery for the second year in a row, to showcase his ILLUSION seat made out of pearls, and inspired by the city of Dubai. His inspiration for this project was drawn from the pearling activities of his ancestors; an Emirati custom that dates back to around 7000 years and was a great source of wealth for the United Arab Emirates and its neighbouring Gulf countries. During the summer, fishermen would head to the sea and stay there for months, in order to access offshore oyster beds. An activity that required a huge communal effort, as well as the ability to dive to huge depths with very little equipment, pearl trade has been woven into the country's rich heritage.

The ILLUSION pearl seat was created using 8000 cultured pearls, formed into ninety metres of chain and woven around the timber frame of the chair. 'The project came after my discovery of an Emirati Company called RAK pearls which is specialised in locally cultured pearls. I was fascinated with this discovery and the company's production of pearls. I thought it's another local material that I can expose in a design object. I created the link between Pearls and my city Dubai and ILLUSION was a line I created inspired by these two elements,'

explains Shafar, who studied furniture and objects design at the Centre for Fine Woodworking in Nelson, New Zealand.

According to the designer, the line was named ILLUSION due to the 'linear weaving that represents motion and speed,' captured in a snapshot of the city highway at night.

During the four-day event and as part of Shafar's exhibit, a pearling expert demonstrated the process of extracting pearls as well as showcased the various types found in oysters.

Shafar, who is quite possibly one of the very few professional Emirati product designers, believes the local design scene is still in its nascent stage, and it's not so hard to see why, when Shafar points to the lack of production facilities available in the Emirates for working designers. 'There are no strong manufacturing and supply chains that cater to individual designers and artists, so it's difficult to move from the conceptual stage as it's not possible for ideas to be prototyped and manufactured. Also, the cultural barriers make it tricky for some male designers, in particular, to express themselves and their passion to design.'

Despite these constraints, Shafar highlights the growth that Dubai has witnessed in the field of design, over the last few years. 'The scene is growing much faster here, compared to other countries in the Gulf region. In the course of two years, we have seen the launching of two design fairs, a design and fashion council was established and a dedicated design district has been announced,' the designer enthuses.



Emirati designer Khalid Shafar believes all great objects are borne from interesting stories and it is this story-telling philosophy that has formed the basis of his designs. A furniture designer by trade, the charismatic Shafar tells vivid stories from his country's heritage through his products. 'My lifestyle, my surroundings, the city I grew up in and my life memories are always a rich source of inspiration for me. Every designer is sensitive to



Shafar is truly flying the flag for Emirati design with his impressive resumé boasting exhibition showcases in Berlin and Tokyo, including a residency in Barcelona and London – a collaboration between the Dubai-based design hub Tashkeel and the Creative Dialogue Association in Spain – aimed at promoting intercultural dialogue. In 2012, Shafar opened his showroom, KASA, in Dubai's Ras al Khorr district to showcase Emirati-designed objects, and offer 'designers, collectors and researchers, with a unique perspective of the aesthetics of UAE design, while shedding light on the influences of local crafts.' Most recently, he helped design the interiors of a contemporary Emirati dining café. On his future plans, Shafar says, 'I look forward to strengthening and widening the awareness and recognition of the brand by focusing on international collaborations and exposure.'

Design Days Dubai

The brainchild of Cyril Zammit, the third edition of DDD saw a total of 34 galleries from 20 different countries taking part, including newcomers such as Algeria, Pakistan and China. Now in its third year, the prestigious fair has established itself as a meeting point for regional and international buyers and collectors interested in contemporary design.