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*The
Creatives*



In Conversation with **Bernard Khoury**; Tomorrow **Bokra** Initiative with Badr Jafar; Misunderstood Controversy of **Creativity & Iconophobia**; Pink Camel; **Murakami's Ego** in Doha; **The Edible Pen**; The Food Designer; Healing with Contemporary Art; & Infusing Universities with The College Experience

Designers & their Products



Khalid Shafar UAE/NEW ZEALAND

Switching careers especially when you are really good at what you do is no easy feat, but for Khalid Shafar moving from being an executive marketing professional to a product designer was answering a long over-due call. Harnessing his passion for design with a degree in furniture and object design in the prestigious Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London and later at the Center for Fine Woodworking in New Zealand, Shafar's products each tell a unique and riveting tale capturing both east and west, south and north in a sleek inherently modern style that never forgets its roots.

"Objects are not just beautiful or useful. They also tell stories. And when we bring an object into our lives, its tale becomes part of our own personal tale." Khalid Shafar

His resume, featuring projects, collaborations and accolades, reads as a virtual dream checklist and there is no wonder why, as Shafar's maintained importance of products that are functional, creative and practical have garnered him attention from all over the world.

Opposite page: ARABI/ Space divider (81 piece of 'Egaal', Brass wire & hinges, wooden rods).
Copyright Khalid Shafar

Oasis Magazine catches up with the talented Emirati designer.

What made you decide to move from being a marketing director to a furniture and product designer?

The move was not a choice. It was always my long-term personal and professional goal to be a designer, but marketing was my first career choice. Academically, I am a combination of both disciplines. I enjoyed obtaining my Business Management degree and my Fine Arts Interior Design degree from the American University in Dubai. To design furniture was a passion I developed more while doing my Interior Design degree and taking a furniture design course. I decided one day I wanted to design a piece that would carry my name always. I don't regret my corporate life at all. It taught me discipline, management skills, and leadership. It also gave me my financial security to follow my long-term goals and achieve what I want in life. I am enjoying my design journey and I feel I belong to this part of me more.

How has your degree in business helped shape your career now as a designer?

It's a rare combination to find but I was fortunate to have both my business and design degrees. I believe today's designers should be shrewd businessmen as well to build and sustain their brands and become profitable. After 8 years in the corporate world within the marketing and communication domain, I am confident that all steps I had taken so far are on the right track towards achieving my long term objective of building a strong reputable Emirati brand with international presence in the world of Design.

You're a great admirer of art and an avid art collector, how has your love of art influenced your designs?

I always believe that art and design share the same sphere yet I also believe that a designer is different than an artist. Both take inspiration from each other's area. For me getting closer to art and to start collecting art was a great compensation for me during my corporate days. Art kept me close to colors, designs and images and it helped stimulate my mind. The way I see it is that a designed object is created to serve a purpose or to solve a problem, yet the way this object is designed makes the viewer react emotionally and for me this is the artistic side of the design. I don't have a direct influence from art yet on any of my pieces I launched but I had used some crafts and handmade parts in my objects that are very artistic in the way they had been made and created.

What is your favorite material to work with?

Timber for sure. It's a living material that gives and takes and each type has its own character to work with. This being said, I had tried other materials as well and I had used some materials for the first time I guess in the furniture making industry such as using the Egaal (the black headband worn by men) to create ARABI space divider and ARABI table lamp. It was a very interesting experiment.

How do you define your design style? And what do you feel is the aesthetic of your creations?

Simple lines mixed with rich details and fine materials are the hallmarks of a KHALID SHAFAR object. It's a revival of the 50's, 60's, and 70's avant-garde sleek styling re-interpreted with today's furnishing trends. For my creations, I believe it's the 'tale' that is the aesthetic side of each object and what creates the attachment with my pieces. Whether you belong to the tale or not, you still react towards it when you read or hear it.

What do you believe are the most important elements in your design?

As of my design philosophy, creativity, practicality and functionality are the most important elements in any of KHALID SHSFAR designs.

What must they represent?

By creativity an object should represents uniqueness and individuality. Each object reflects a quirky design to fit a particular space. Through practicality I create handy objects that are useful for interior spaces and as part of a home's furnishing. My objects fit particular purposes and have their own clientele.

Functionality comes from a clear vision. KHALID SHAFAR objects serve a multitude of purposes and spaces. Many objects have been designed to function in more than one mood, depending on the tales they tell.

What do you hope to achieve through your designs and your products?

In some objects, my designs are statements to communicate particular messages for communities and to nations and in others, they are tales to share and enjoy. I don't want the owner of a KHALID SHAFAR object to conceive it as a piece of art but a functional object to use in daily life and to serve its purposes.

There are hardly enough product designers in the region; what do you think is lacking?

I can start with the lack of proper education programs in specialized design and art. For example, we do not have a proper Product Design Degree in the UAE nor professional courses



LITTLE PALM / Stools (Ash wood, metal base, velvet upholstered seat with handmade palm leaves woven mat). Copyright Khalid Shafar



THE PALM / Coat stand (Pine wood, metal base and hangers). Copyright Khalid Shafar



ARABI / Table Lamp (Metal structure, Wool 'Egaal', Brass wire). Copyright Khalid Shafar



ILLUSION – Arm / Armchair (Stained Ash wood, Polyester rope). Copyright Khalid Shafar

in particular majors. Also, the lack of strong manufacturing and supply chains that cater for individual designers and artists make it difficult for designers in particular to move from the idea stage as this prevents them from prototyping their ideas and manufacturing them. This being said, the cultural barriers in some societies make it very difficult for some designers to express themselves and their passion to design regardless the field due to families and cultural constraints and concerns. My advice is to take advantage of these shortcomings by first experimenting with new materials to work with such as daily use simple materials: use the World Wide Web more as a source of research and use the old fashion school of design by prototyping small-scale handmade models. Finally, in regards to culture, everything always start with a first step, so let us take these first steps and educate our culture and societies about Design and the importance of design in our life and for the development of our countries.

If you had to pick your favorite design thus far, what would it be? And why?

This is a very tough question (smiles) but I always play it safe to say, it is with no doubt DUBAI JOURNEY – the Carrom game board. I am emotionally attached to this piece being a game I used to play in my childhood. I made this piece in the first three months after I moved to New Zealand from Dubai. I was very homesick, it being my first move out of my country, and the making of this piece was a tribute to my hometown. It is a one off designer's piece.

If you could be known for just one thing, what would you like it to be?

A Cutting-edge Designer smile.

What advice would you give aspiring designers?

Think Global and Act Global. Although we come from a region that lacks the long design history, this shouldn't stop us from using the little we have on hand to create and innovate. Keep designing to define your style and push hard to position yourself out there in the design world with your work and design ideas. Show the world that this region has great designers with international work standards.

What are you working on next?

After the launch of my 2012 collection, the focus now is to commercialize some of the objects in this collection through particular design retailers and galleries while continue building the awareness of my brand. In addition, I am involved in a craft project with a group of international designers for an international gallery to be revealed and launched in March 2012 in Dubai during Design Days Dubai. Also, I am in the process of developing a KHALID SHAFAR signature fabric to be used in my future releases. I will spend the first quarter of 2012 in designing my new collection for 2013. Work is still in progress (smiles).

www.khalidshafar.co.nz