

**STUFF** WORTH READING ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

# HENRY TALKS STUFF

# ADVENTURER'S SPIRIT ACHIEVING WORK- PLAY BALANCE

# PLAYING POP CULTURE HERO, SUPERMAN

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# BY DESIGN

HE IS AFFECTIONATELY KNOWN AS THE POSTER BOY FOR DESIGN IN THE UAE – AND WITH GOOD REASON. A DUBAI NATIVE, KHALID SHAFAR'S PASSION FOR ALL THINGS DESIGN AND ACUMEN FOR ALL THINGS BUSINESS HAS PUT HIM AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE REGIONAL INDUSTRY.

✍ Rania Habib 📷 Supplied

**A** KHALID SHAFAR object is [...] sparked by a moment of inspiration and developed through a process of applied creativity, practicality, and functionality – until a design is formulated. Each object is the outcome of many experiments. Each object has its own journey and tale to tell." Sleek, contemporary, and functional, Khalid Shafar's products are the physical manifestation of the young designer's vision.

Launched in 2010, the KHALID SHAFAR brand encompasses Telltale Designs, the products he painstakingly creates, and KASA, his showcase space in Dubai's Ras Al Khor area. The neighbourhood was also the inspiration behind DRAK (Design Ras Al Khor), a collective established in 2015 and founded by four of the UAE's most prominent designers: Shafar, naturally; Nadine Kanso; Khulood Al Thani; and Tarik Al Zaharna. "In real life, the four of us are very close friends," explains Shafar. "We come from different creative industries, and some of us were the first in our respective fields." DRAK presented its first exhibition during the inaugural Dubai Design Week, and will repeat the experience in October, for its second edition.

SWR caught up with Shafar fresh off the madness of March, the month dedicated to all things art, culture, and design in Dubai. He presented a major installation, *FORMA*, at Design Days Dubai in collaboration with Nakkash Gallery, a one-of-a-kind immersive design experience. The specially-commissioned piece explored shapes and forms that "result from connection and interconnection." The soft-spoken designer also presented existing pieces at WASL, the largest retrospective of UAE design to date by established and emerging designers, presented by Design Days Dubai and supported by Dubai Design District (d3) and Dubai Culture.

Having blazed a trail for himself in a nascent design scene, Shafar is now paving the way for others. Born in 1980 in Dubai, he is a business graduate of the American University in Dubai, and worked in marketing and communications for years before completing a degree in Fine Arts in Interior Design in 2005. In 2009, he left the corporate world for his passion – design. He also specialised in Furniture & Objects Design at Central Saint



Martins College of Art and Design in London, and later at the Centre for Fine Woodworking in Nelson, New Zealand. Our conversation with the designer explores what went into the making of the KHALID SHAFAR brand, and the entrepreneurial advice he picked up along the way.

#### ON LAUNCHING HIS BRAND:

"That was as a result of the influence of my business background. Although I had first graduated with a degree in interior design, I further educated myself in product design. My philosophy is that if I design a space, it could last a few years and then it might get renovated – my design is not timeless. Products, on the other hand, survive even if

they are not in use, and can be a reference for a newer product. When I launched, there were no Emirati furniture brands. It's always a big risk in entrepreneurship to put your name to a brand – but I accepted it from the start. There was never another option for me."

#### ON HIS CURRENT STATUS:

"The brand is growing – it may be a slow growth, but it's good. We shouldn't be running fast, we should be careful in how we move forward. I have been participating in different exhibitions, creating different collections, and working on more collaborations and partnerships. It has been a little over five years since I launched, and it's time to rewind – to reset things internally, set up proper studio spaces, renovate my showcase space, and

reinforce more solid foundations to grow further in the next 20, 50, even 100 years!"

#### ON HIS REASONS FOR THE REWIND:

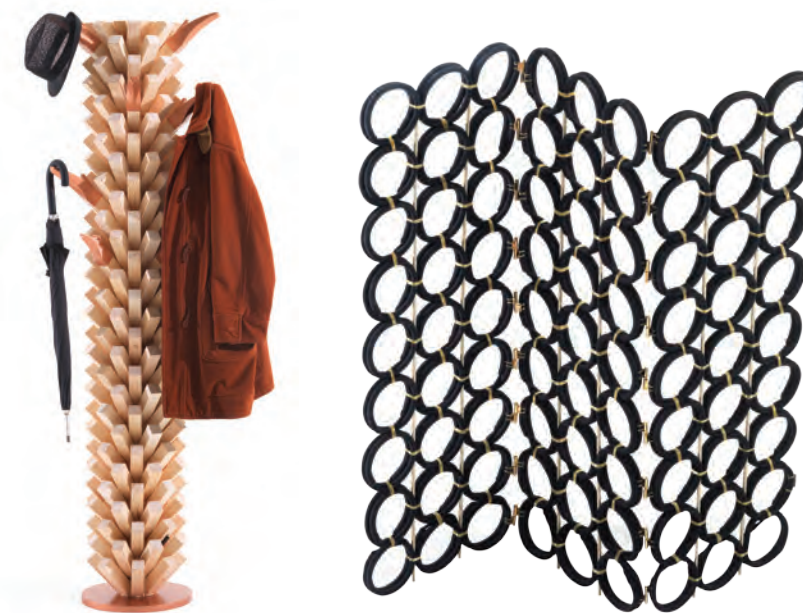
"It's a process. I am keeping the same space, but I will accommodate for the growth of the team. I'd like to have junior designers join me, so the new set up will follow that. I am also looking to outsource some of the production for some of the commercial lines as well. So this is kind of an internal tidying up and re-organising, which will allow my brand to grow better. This period of my life taught me a lot: having a degree in business management helps when you have a creative degree. I always wear two hats, which might be strange to creatives – but I have both disciplines, and it's important to establish a balance. My brand is both a business and a design brand."

#### ADVICE FOR BUDDING DESIGNERS:

"Before you embark on anything, you have to have some clarity about what you want to be and where you want to be in the future. Fresh graduates come from a new world with lots of thoughts and ideas in their mind – so sit back and take the time to think about it deeply. We, the more experienced designers, are all out there: learn from us and our challenges, and if you feel up to it, get into it.

Also, the old adage goes: think local, act global. I say: think global, and act global. Though we have our own set of challenges in the region, we also have a small supportive community that has not reached maturity yet – so there are lots of opportunities around. From the start, don't simply focus all your efforts on proving yourself locally, or you will face major challenges to put your name outside." ■

[www.khalidshafar.com](http://www.khalidshafar.com)



■ THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: THE PALM LAMP; THE ARABI SPACE DIVIDER; THE PALM COAT STAND.