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Design
Days Dubai:
a definitive
guide

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This silk screen Whale print is great big fun. The graphic ocean pattern is bang on-trend, and the whale spout hearts add some quirkiness. Receive the print in a handy tube mailer, then have it framed locally, £60 (Dh351), mengsel.bigcartel.com



a minute with Khalid Shafar

Personal statement

The Emirati designer Khalid Shafar left a job in marketing to pursue a lifelong interest in design. He splits his time between Dubai and Auckland and is committed to creating items that 'tell a tale'

I spend nearly half of the year in Dubai and the other half either in Auckland in New Zealand or travelling around for work.

What I love most about Dubai is the great energy and buzz generated by its cosmopolitan community. It might seem to be a very business-oriented city, but there is also a great social aspect to life in Dubai – both by day and by night.

Dubai is a young, well-organised city that has great services. For me, the safety and hospitality are incomparable to any other city in the world.

I left a career in marketing because it was always my long-term personal and professional goal to be a designer. Academically, I am a combination of the two disciplines. I hold both a business management degree and a fine arts and interior design degree from the American University in Dubai.

I first knew I wanted to be a furniture designer when I was doing my interior design degree and then my furniture design course. I decided that one day I would design a piece that would carry my name.

I did not realise this dream until the end of 2009, when I gave up my corporate job and took a furniture design course at the Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London. This was followed by a move to New Zealand to take a year-long furniture making course.

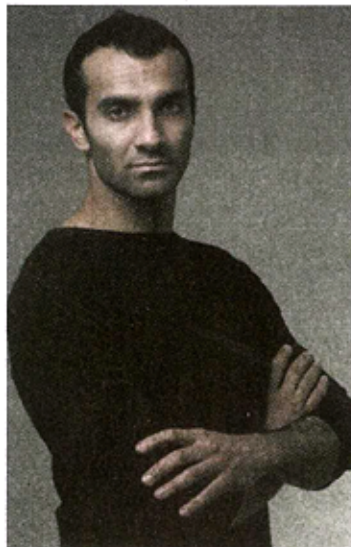
This experience confirmed my lifelong passion for design and was the start of a new journey for me – and I have never looked back.

I believe each decision in my life has led to the next. If I didn't obtain university degrees in both design and business, I would not have the solid marketing and communications experience that has created the financial security to allow me to pursue my lifelong passion.

And if I didn't go to the UK and New Zealand to study furniture design and have the opportunity to live abroad, I wouldn't have the international influences that I do in my design and business today.

A string of events has led me to where I am today, and I am very fortunate to be realising my ambitions and dreams.

My products are a revival of the sleek avant-garde styling of the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies, reinterpreted with today's furnishing trends in mind. Simple lines mixed



with rich details and fine materials are the hallmarks of a Khalid Shafar object.

Right now I am working on a new lighting object that I will be exhibiting during Design Days Dubai as part of Carwan Gallery's exhibition, *Design and New Perspectives in Middle Eastern Crafts*. I am one of eight international designers who have been commissioned to design an object that reflects a Middle Eastern craft but put together in a contemporary way.

I have also been invited to exhibit and lecture at the Outdoor Lifestyle Hangzhou exhibition in China between March 21 and 24.

I am also working on my 2013 collection and am in the process of developing my own signature fabric pattern.

The easiest way to jazz up a space is to add colour, whether in the form of paint, paintings or accessories. Personally, I try to create a focal point in the space, whether it's a feature wall, a design object in the centre or corner, or a well-designed lighting object that can create a whole new atmosphere.

If I could design one thing that I haven't yet, it would be a display unit for a fashion house. I believe fashion houses have great history, themes and style, which would challenge a designer to come up with a design that reflects the personality of the fashion label but still represents their personal style signature.

Labels like Balenciaga, Alexander McQueen, Vivienne Westwood and Kenzo, or even some of my favourite Kiwi brands like Zambesi, World and Alexandra Owens, could



Clockwise from above, Illusion arm chair; Arabi table lamp; The Palm coat stand. Photos courtesy of Khalid Shafar

Simple lines mixed with rich details and fine materials are the hallmarks of my objects

be great – and very challenging – projects.

On my iPod, you'll find the fast, loud music that I listen to while at the gym, out running or doing any kind of sport.

But when it comes to music in general I believe that – somewhat surprisingly – when you cross the 30 mark, your tastes change. So I am now a fan of jazz music. Ella Fitzgerald and Diana Krall are my favourites, not to forget Fairuz from the Arab world. I can also listen to Umm Kulthum late at night with my mum.

The most important book I have ever read is *It's Not How Good You Are, It's How Good You Want to Be* by Paul Arden. I really couldn't stop reading this book. I finished it in three hours, in just one sitting. Another amazing book is *The Rules of Life* by Richard Templar.

If I had to choose between form and function, I would choose function. I believe in functional design. I be-

lieve that form can sometimes limit the functionality of an object, but, on the contrary, the functionality of an object can shape its form.

Design is like problem solving. A good design, for me, is something that combines what I embrace as my design ethos: functionality, practicality and creativity.

I decided to get involved with Design Days Dubai because I believe it's the first step in building a strong base for design in the region, and in creating a platform for design launches and creative gatherings.

An annual event like Design Days Dubai will attract more and more international design galleries in the future and will address, and resolve, many challenges that designers face locally.

★ Khalid Shafar was speaking to Selina Denman

● For more information, visit www.khalidshafar.co.nz

