

Public spaces

DESIGN IN DUBAI WITH KHALID SHAFAR

28.04.14



Palm Collection - stools and table

Dubai is vibrant and ever-changing city in terms of architecture, art and design. Often associated with opulence and excess, it has become a hive of creativity and is home to many

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Dubai is vibrant and ever-changing city in terms of architecture, art and design. Often associated with opulence and excess, it has become a hive of creativity and is home to many raising talents. We met internationally acclaimed designer Khalid Shafar, who was born and works in the United Arab Emirates, to discuss his projects and the influence of Dubai on his work.

You often refer to the Brazilian Campana Brothers who have a very different, if not unique, approach to design that is closely linked to their culture. What do you think makes your work unique?

The different contemporary references to my culture and my roots are an important aspect of my work - I believe each object tells a tale and this idea underpins the originality of my approach. As for the Campana Brothers, I collaborated with them (on an installation for Abu Dhabi Art 2010) and I identify with, and admire, many elements of their work.



Abu Dhabi Art 2010 - collaboration with the Campana Brothers

I have to admit to being a rather “old school” designer who prefers hand-drawn sketches to computer generated drawings. I enjoy expressing my culture through objects in a contemporary and original way. This is what defines my aesthetic style.

Architecture in the city of Dubai is associated with opulence and gigantism. Is this echoed in the world of design?

I don’t think that this is as easy to integrate these qualities into design as it is into architecture. Yet, there can also be extremes when designing luxury products, especially by using rare or expensive materials like gold or diamonds. I believe that this “opulence” is part of our identity in Dubai.

Where does street furniture in Dubai find its inspiration? Have you worked on projects related to street furniture in public spaces?

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At the moment, I don't think that enough attention is given to designing street furniture in the city and urban spaces. The furniture around us has without doubt been designed to fit in with the surrounding landscapes and materials, but there is as yet no formal design process for these kinds of projects. Professional designers in the sector have few guidelines to follow. Local authorities are usually in charge of managing street furniture - I believe that in most cases major contractors are commissioned to do the job by their in-house designers.

In 2011, I took part in a community initiative by S*uce concept store in Dubai. Designers were commissioned to create outdoor benches that make a social statement in the city and would encourage local authorities to increase the number of benches.

In my interpretation, I focused more on functionality rather than aesthetics. I strived to reach the equation "Three equals Nine". Benches across the globe provide moments of rest, relaxation, complicity and storytelling. However, I wanted my 3-seater to offer this kind of moment to more than 3 people. The more, the merrier! With a simple move or flip 3 more people and then 3 more. In total, the bench holds up to 9 people. It also changes position depending on its location: you can lie down on it to relax, read or take a nap in a park, or, it can become a dining table in a mall or on the beach. The design is ideal for bus and metro stations as fewer benches can accommodate more waiting people. A touch of gold colour was used to reflect Dubai as "The City of Gold" and the metallic finish enhances its contemporary.

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Bench by Khalid Shafar

Does the city of Dubai heavily influence your work? For example, your reinterpretations of the palm, one of the city's symbols? What does this object represent for you?

The city has an important impact on my designs. My life, my memories and my hometown of Dubai play an important role in my work and they are the first place I turn to when looking for inspiration or new ideas.

The PALM line/collection is very personal and evokes my childhood memories of living among palm trees at my family house. I remember playing around these trees and watching every season as they were fertilized. We all enjoyed collecting and eating the dates they produced - I haven't lost my really sweet tooth for dates!





Palm Collection - coat stand

To finish, what extent do you think design is universal?

I don't believe that all designs are universal. However, I believe that good design should be. It needs to appeal to a wide audience and fit within different kinds of spaces. It should be timeless and last for many generations.

KEY WORDS

DESIGN STREET FURNITURE

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