

architecture, interiors & industrial design
designMENA

> Specify > Furnishing > Interview: Khalid Shafar on building UAE's design scene

Posted 12/20/2015 FURNISHING / SPECIFY Leave a comment

Interview: Khalid Shafar on building UAE's design scene



AIDAN IMANOVA



When we first met Khalid Shafar in 2011, he was already the proud designer of the Little Palm stool along with other whimsical furniture pieces that were reminiscent of his childhood as an Emirati.

Today, Shafar has created over forty furniture pieces, a series of pop up exhibitions, collaboration works and commissions, in addition to establishing his own design studio, KASA, located in the Ras Al Khor area of Dubai.

Being one of the first Emirati designers to surface amongst international design names, it is safe to say that Shafar's contribution has put Emirati design on the map. From his involvement in the Wallpaper* exhibition 'Middle East Revealed' to his collaboration with the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC), both exhibited at the London Design Festival, Shafar has helped shift the preconception of Arab design through his contemporary application of traditional materials and themes.

Tweets by @designMENA

Tweets

DubaiDesignWeek
@DubaiDesignWeek
Khalid Shafar talks to @designMENA on his mission to build UAE's design scene & launch of DRAK during #DXBDW 2015 bit.ly/1ka4pOw
Retweeted by designMENA

designMENA
@designMENA
@RIBA launches global architecture award with jury including #RichardRogers: bit.ly/1YoTmnC #architecture #awards

Downtown Design 16h
Tweet to @designMENA

Monthly Most Discussed

- Arabian Nightmare**
There are very few architects or designers who don't ... [More](#)
- Architect claims Dubai failed by trying to recreate Tokyo skyscrapers**
New York architect, Danny Forster, of Danny Forster Des... [More](#)
- In Pictures: Foster's Jordan airport**
Foster + Partners has shared images of its newly opened... [More](#)

- Heriot-Watt Dubai launches interior design course**
Heriot-Watt has launched a Bachelor's degree in interior... [More](#)
- Map of architecture and interior design Twitter users takes off**
A map that charts members of the interior design, archi... [More](#)

Most Recent

- [Toyo Ito and Kengo Kuma compete for Tokyo Olympics stadium replacing Hadid](#)
- [Interview: Khalid Shafar on building UAE's design scene](#)
- [Fire safety doors for Middle East market](#)
- [RIBA launches global architecture award with jury including Richard Rogers](#)
- [RMJM restructures business in Dubai](#)



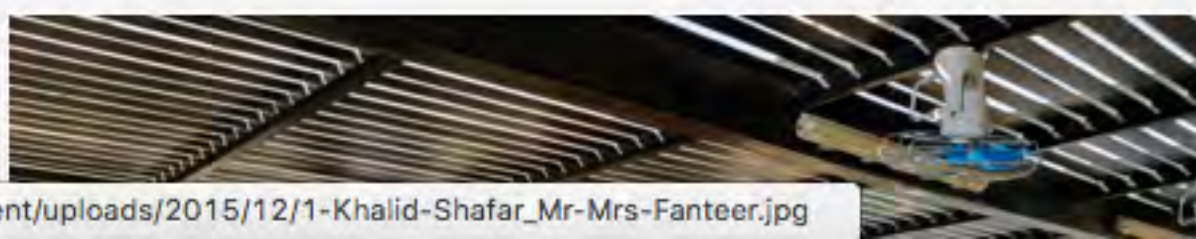
Khalid Shafar next to his Mr and Mrs Fanteer project.

Shafar's main goal is to continue building Dubai's design scene both locally and internationally and encouraging other Emirati designers to follow suit. This he made clear during the Dubai Design Week that took place in October, where he unveiled four different exhibits in addition to his own initiative, Design Ras Al Khor (DRAK) together with four other designers.

When we met at his design studio KASA during the unveiling of DRAK, Shafar said that contributing to the evolution of design in the UAE is the responsibility of all working in the field.

"Everyone's contribution, from individuals to organisations to the overall community, is key in building the design scene here in the UAE. This contribution is the content of our local design scene and our commodity to export internationally. Personally, I take it as a mission and a way to give back to my country," he explained.

Shafar is a strong believer in the idea of local creatives shaping the design landscape of each country and the UAE is no different.





David O'Brien joined DRAK initiative with his 'wildlife menu'.

“As an Emirati designer, I feel responsible for my contribution in shaping our design story,” he said.

Speaking of his many installations and projects during the event, Shafar assured that this is the “correct way” to present one’s work at an event of such importance.

“It [Dubai Design Week] is a citywide event and although you can’t cover the entire city, I planned where and how to present my installations and product launches across Dubai. I believe this will encourage established and emerging designers to present more work during the design week and spread themselves across the city with their work,” he said.

Influenced by design weeks from London to Milan, Shafar commented that the key is to utilise the entire city as one big design showcase.

“I believe a design week is a citywide event and it should reflect this well through its distribution and community involvement. So, I hope to see more focus across public areas where people interact on daily basis. This will enhance design education and knowledge and will contribute in supporting the industry,” he commented.

On the other hand, Shafar praised the event for achieving global recognition: “Dubai Design Week has already booked a spot for itself on the global design agenda and therefore this event will definitely draw more international attention to Dubai and the UAE and will support the city’s vision in positioning itself as a design hub for the region.”

Design Ras Al Khor (DRAK)

DRAK was born out of an admiration for local designers coming together and creating a project based on a joint theme. The initiative involved three core members including Shafar, fashion designer Khulood Thani and jewellery designer Nadine Kanso, who decided on the theme of the Ras Al Khor Wildlife Sanctuary before approaching Tarek Zaharana to represent the architectural discipline. David O'Brien then joined the team to exhibit his 'wildlife menu' as a food designer.



“We established the three key principles that will be applied every year which is design research, innovation and material exploration. These principles are the key points that designers will need to think about and integrate into their projects,” explained Shafar.



Flame-Ingo candleholder corresponds to various parts of the bird's body.

The location was an important aspect of the initiative and a major influence behind the chosen theme. Located in Shafar's design space KASA in Ras Al Khor, the initiative aimed to highlight the industrial district and encourage more visitors to discover this area of the city.

“We wanted to inject the words Ras Al Khor in the name because no matter how the event evolves in the future, we always wanted to remind people that it started here and that it was for this area,” Shafar explained.

“We tried to get the audience to familiarise themselves with the area and thought about what makes this place special and what are some of the highlights and the Wildlife Reserve was what struck us the most. Also, it was a rich source to draw inspiration from.”

f

🐦

G+

in

+



'Feed Me. Colour Me.' project focused on the colouration cycle of the flamingo.

Flame-ingo and Mr and Mrs Fanteer are Shafar's two projects as part of DRAK that both reinterpret the image of a flamingo bird.

Mr and Mrs Fanteer are a pair of side drawers that humorously reference the flamingo, known in the UAE as 'fanteer'. Originally driven by Shafar's THE PALM series, the pieces are transformed into a bird's body and injected with an eye that disappears when the drawer is opened. The pieces also touch upon the difficulties of breeding among the species in the UAE due to noise pollution and construction.

Flame-Ingo explored the relationship between material and form. A mass-produced industrial material, the pavement lock is used to create a candleholder that is once again inspired by the shape of the flamingo. The candleholder's components correspond to various parts of the bird's body such as the tall, slender shape of the candlestick referencing the long neck of the flamingo. As the candle burns and melts over the interlock body, it sculpts a layer of melted wax that suggests its feathers. The grouping of the candles also mimics the mating dance of the birds.



Shafar's main goal is to continue building Dubai's design scene both locally and internationally.

Other projects under the DRAK umbrella include Zaharana's 'The Ataraxia' installation that offers a variety of experiences of the wildlife sanctuary; Thani's 'Feed Me. Colour Me.' project focusing on the colouration cycle of the flamingo and Kanso's 'The City &



The Birds' jewellery design that shows the contrast between nature and urbanism.

DRAK will progress to become an annual event, unveiled each year during Dubai Design Week, that will feature alternative design fields with each being represented by a single designer who will be selected by the founders. The theme for next year's initiative is 'Celebrating Wood'.

"We are planning to revert expectations because with wood people assume product design or architecture, but instead we will go in the opposite direction. We will do something unexpected," said Shafar.

Other future plans for DRAK is the possibility of showcasing at international design festivals such as Milan or London with talks already underway.

Win, Love, Victory

Another important and more serious participation at this year's Dubai Design Week was Shafar's Win, Love, Victory, a site specific installation at Downtown Design, in collaboration with the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC).

The installation is an homage to the 45 Emirati soldiers who lost their lives during their mission in Yemen, a first in the UAE's military history.

"I took an emotional direction with this installation," Shafar revealed. "I think as a designer it was the minimum that I could do, to commemorate the soldiers. I didn't intend to create any sad emotions or remind people who lost their loved ones, but I also don't think this is something we could ever forget."



The installation is a homage to the fallen Emirati soldiers.

"We don't want to celebrate design and forget loss. Because these people were the ones who made us feel free and safe enough to celebrate design and launch such an event, so the least we can do is to bring them back to life to share the joy with us. The installation is a homage and a commemoration of these soldiers."

The design itself presents a total of 45 crafted wooden stools in



American cherry and soft maple, derived from Shafar's previous work called the Little Palm stool.

"I wanted to create a metaphor between my Little Palm Stools, which are inspired by the palm tree and the soldiers. They both withstand a lot of harsh circumstances and overcome obstacles to survive including climate and water shortages among other things.

"But there is also a direct translation of the message with the use of the upholstery in a camouflage pattern that was taken from the original fabric used for the UAE military uniforms. This was a way of injecting the souls of the soldiers into the work."



The installation consist of 45 crafted wooden stools in American cherry and soft maple.

The name also contributes to the continuous symbolism that is embodied in the installation.

"Win, Love, Victory is obviously a salute to Sheikh Mohamed when he first introduced it at the Government Summit in 2013 but I was so fascinated by the meaning behind it. It is not just about the sign, it also relates to work ethics, success and our love for our nation and I believe that is exactly what those soldiers believed in and what they sacrificed their lives for," Shafar explained.

He also added that his intention was not to touch upon politics but to create something that will allow people to keep their memories of bravery alive.

"There is nothing political here, this is just a homage to the people who protected us. I belong to this country — I am an Emirati. And it is clearly a local project, it is specific to the Emirates and if all my projects go all over the world, I would prefer this one to stay here. It's for the people of the UAE," he said.

"I did not intend to create sad emotions but I am happy with people's reactions and their acceptance of my work because some might think it is better not to remember such tragedies, but who will forget, and why should we forget?"

PUZZLE

In collaboration with the Fatima Bint Mohamed Bin Zayed Initiative, Shafar also presented the PUZZLE collection featuring



three distinctive editions of handmade wool rugs woven in Afghanistan.

Part of a social initiative, the collaborative project aimed to provide employment to women in Afghanistan as well as healthcare and education.



Shafar presented the PUZZLE collection featuring three distinctive editions of handmade wool rugs.

The collection is an adaption of the Khalid Shafar signature pattern woven in the Afghani Chapat weaving style. The puzzle design was inspired by the pattern itself. It allows all three carpets to join in order to form a larger single piece.

To highlight the role of the craftswomen involved, specific parts of the pattern in each rug have been left as a blank canvas for the Afghani artisans to contribute their own designs.

The Afghani pattern that was chosen is a variation of the Mauri Gul motif that originates from the western province of Herat and is typically woven by nomads. There are many interpretations of the motif but the most widely accepted relates to the return of the nomads to the start point of their travels, hence the circular pattern.



The collaborative project aimed to provide employment to women in Afghanistan.

This collection was first premiered in Milan, Italy during Milan Design Week last April.

f

Twitter

G+

in

+



The collaborative project aimed to provide employment to women in Afghanistan.

This collection was first premiered in Milan, Italy during Milan Design Week last April.

In addition to these projects, Shafar also created a design and fashion installation called 'Hybrid' at the O concept store as part of the 'Around the City' initiative and The Nomad public installation inspired by Artish architecture and in collaboration with AHEC. The installation was first unveiled at the London Design Festival.

Advertisement

This entry was posted in [Furnishing](#), [Specify](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

[Tweet](#) [Like](#) 12 [Email](#)

[+](#)
All services

[Fire safety doors for Middle East market](#)

[Toyo Ito and Kengo Kuma compete for Tokyo Olympics stadium replacing Hadid](#)

Add a comment

YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS WILL NOT BE PUBLISHED. REQUIRED FIELDS ARE MARKED *

Name *

Email *

Submit

[f](#)
[Twitter](#)
[G+](#)
[in](#)
[+](#)