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THE
SMARTEST
MAN IN
AMERICA?

HOW A 34-YEAR-OLD GEEK
CHANGED AMERICAN POLITICS FOREVER



EDITOR'S LETTER

This issue we look at a 34-year-old self-confessed geek who has changed the face of American politics forever. His dead-on statistical analysis of the US presidential election last year wrong-footed a broadcast media dominated by 'talking heads'. Can it last? Maybe not even our cover star Nate Silver can predict that. We look forward to a month of arts and culture in the Emirate with features on Art Dubai, Design Days and Emirates International Festival of Literature. Munich is Germany's most expensive city in which to live, but it also houses lots of heritage – we journey down one of its most interesting streets. We also chart the rise of the restaurateur, and discover why even the most star-kissed chefs are heading back to the kitchen. Our photo essay sees us head to America's heartland, where three Swedes have produced a stunning book of photography. Enjoy the issue.

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Words by **Tahira Yaqoob**

A Design For Life

DESIGN DAYS DUBAI
AIMS TO PROMOTE
AESTHETICS IN
THE EMIRATES

When the flamboyant Frenchman Jean Royère opened his first design studio in the 1930s, it was not in Paris but Alexandria in Egypt.

Other branches followed in Beirut, Amman and Tehran, their ornate products all distinguished by his hallmarks of rich, jewel-like colours, organic forms and precious materials.

Royère's lavish style found favour with the Middle Eastern elite and he spent his career designing commissioned pieces for the likes of the Shah of Iran and King Hussein of Jordan.

"If you go to the palaces in Tehran, they are fully designed by Royère, from the walls and lights to the chairs, desks and doors," says Guillaume Cuiry, director of La Galerie Nationale in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue.

He was not the only designer of his time to look eastwards: the famed Swiss architect and designer Le Corbusier was key to the regeneration of newly liberated Chandigarh in India in the 1950s while the late French

designer Charlotte Perriand travelled extensively throughout Japan and Vietnam in the 1940s and 1950s.

This month, that long-standing marriage between Eastern tastes and influential Western design is being firmly cemented with Design Days Dubai (DDD), a homage to the best of the world's design and now in its second year.



Sitting alongside the firmly-established Art Dubai fair, it aims to introduce a new audience to the aesthetics of high-end design and its close association with fine art. And rather than being a glorified furniture sale, its director Cyril Zammit says it is a natural extension of the contemporary art fair as the buyers are "people who already collect art and have the potential to invest in design."

"They are all collectible pieces," he adds. "They still have a functionality but I try to avoid considering them as furniture pieces."

"Technically, you could use them in your house but this type of work is becoming increasingly exclusive and is a form of art."

They include, in this year's eclectic offering, a lamp made from 20,000 hand-painted toothpicks and shipped with great difficulty by the gallery Broached Commissions from Melbourne, Australia; an upended brass Taj Mahal turned into a table, and from Galerie Sofie Lachaert in Belgium, a seemingly delicate paper-thin bowl constructed from real bricks and mortar.

Practical they are not – as Zammit says: "You would not want your children playing with them" – but they do aim to present the possibilities of interior design beyond mere function.

They also seal Dubai's ambitions to be regarded as an international hub of design alongside more recognised fairs such as Design Miami/Basel, and Pad in London, Paris and New York.

"Design Days Dubai has enabled the city to be ranked among an elite group – London, Paris, Basel, New York and Miami – which host fairs specialising in both art and design," says Zammit.

If its aspirations were not clear enough from that statement, they are embodied in the bold

MORE THAN A GLORIFIED FURNITURE SALE, IT'S A NATURAL EXTENSION OF THE ART FAIR, JUST FOCUSING ON DESIGN

declaration set to hang at the entrance to the fair.

Brussel's Victor Hunt Gallery displayed the work Clock Clock (White) in Miami last year featuring 24 wall clocks programmed to collectively display the time or spell out messages.

In the city known for building the biggest, the tallest and the most extravagant, the gallery will be coming in March with the piece – only this time with 260 clocks, to be used as an announcement board at the fair.

But if Dubai is to outdo its rivals, it has its work cut out. While Saudis, Kuwaitis and Indians were extravagant spenders last year, few Emiratis bought work and the pieces that sold were largely decorative but, says Zammit: "We had a lot of interest last year from visitors wanting to learn."

"It is still quite a premature market and very obvious pieces like mirrors, tables and chairs sold but I think buyers are slowly going toward more abstract pieces."

In terms of scale, Dubai's offering of 29 largely international galleries, including nine from the



Middle East, is on a par with the rest of the world.

Can it really add value to the city though when so few designers and pieces are from the region and when an interest in design is still nascent?

Cuiry says the Middle East holds a special appeal for that very reason: "Europe and America are very jaded. In Paris, they know Royère and Le Corbusier and the first discussion is about the price."

"Here they act on a feeling simply because they like the design. Last year I saw the appetite of visitors; they wanted to learn."

Originally based in Paris, he decided to open his Dubai base last year after an influx of customers from Qatar, Kuwait and the Emirates to his French outlet.

"For a long time, we have had art collectors coming to our gallery in Europe," he says. "After some time we realised something was happening in the Middle East."

Perhaps it is because of the historic links with the likes of Royère – Cuiry says "50 per cent of designers in Beirut are close students of his style" – but the burgeoning appreciation of design is starting to take hold regionally.

The Majlis Gallery in Dubai, started more than 20 years ago by interior designer Alison Collins, who was enticed by the ambiance of the old district of Bastakiya, is displaying

a bronze table shaped like a tree by Damascus-born Mustafa Ali.

And while the J&A Gallery's collection of industrial-style furniture made from reclaimed oddments from central European





THIS MARKET IS DIFFICULT AS PEOPLE ARE NOT FAMILIAR WITH THE AESTHETICS BUT THE TREND FOR DESIGN IS GROWING



factories, hospitals and flea markets gives more than a passing nod to the Bauhaus modernist style – a world away from the UAE’s love of all things bling – its founder decided to open his only outlet in Dubai.

Director Sebastian Jaroslawski says: “Our customers come from across the Middle East, India and Russia and Dubai is a hub for the region.

“I like the raw aspect of industrial architecture and design and of trying to give older pieces new value.

“This is a difficult market because people are not familiar with the aesthetics but there are a number of private villas which have been built in the Bauhaus

style in Jumeirah recently so there is a growing trend for this kind of thing.”

For Trevyn McGowan, co-director of Southern Guild gallery from South Africa, it is “a given” that the audience for Dubai’s longer-running contemporary art fair is made up of the same people buying collectible design.

“You are reaching the same market. It is symbiotic rather than a hindrance to have both an art and a design fair,” she says.

That growing awareness is being nurtured throughout the Emirates. The design fair has invited visitors to be accompanied by experts guiding them on provenance while last September, Dubai Culture and Arts Authority dispatched four Emiratis on a six-month training course in Dubai, London and Barcelona to learn all aspects of design.

Meanwhile the American University of Sharjah’s school

of architecture, art and design has been providing undergraduates with a grounding in product design to “define, enhance and transform the world around them”.

Collector Ramin Salsali says design is closely tied in with wellbeing; that creating an aesthetically pleasing environment is more conducive to productivity: “We are surrounded by products with great design, from toothbrushes and mobile phones to computers and cars.”

Zammit agrees: “Design is everywhere.”

He points to Dubai’s iconic skyline and the diversity of furnishings on sale, priced from \$5,000 to half a million dollars, by way of example.

“Design not only provides a pragmatic solution,” he says, “it enhances the aesthetic of a city and even acts as a signature.”



FORWARD THINKING / Cyril Zammit prefers to think of the objects on display at the fair as collectibles rather than furniture pieces