

The Middle East's architecture, design, interiors + property magazine

# identity<sup>®</sup>

ISSUE 133  
YEAR TWELVE  
OCTOBER 2014  
A MOTIVATE PUBLICATION



**Spot-on! Creating ambiance powered by light**

**Design Downtown: the best of today's design**

**Interior vision: step into inspirational living spaces**

**Celebrating Nakkash: pioneering style perfectionist**

DHS 20.00 RO 2.00 BD 2.00  
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Wajih Nakkash

## Trends trail-blazer

Reflecting on Dubai's evolution into a global design capital is architect and interior designer Wajih Nakkash, one of the pioneers of interior design in the UAE will be present at Downtown Design, showcasing Theodore Alexander's latest collections. **TEXT: LAURA VOLPI**

**Lebanese-born Wajih Nakkash established** his architecture firm in Dubai in 1980, and shortly afterwards opened Nakkash Gallery, a boutique offering elegant furniture, artwork and accessories with a special eye on outdoor spaces: they were the first to introduce Dedon's designs to the UAE.

After studying architecture and interior design in Beirut and Florence, Nakkash brought to Dubai the influences of both West and East, in a melange that proved successful: his firm grew strong and now includes daughter Aya on the managing side, and son Omar on the designing team.

**identity** meets this pioneering visionary to speak of the future and reminisce on the great conquests of the past.

### What are you going to showcase at Downtown Design?

This year Nakkash Gallery will be exhibiting Theodore Alexander for the second time. The impressive collection consists of several thousand designs, each offering eclectic, traditional and modern classical furniture and accessories, which is what my design aesthetic is based on. I try to appeal to a clientele that look for comfortable and simple style, yet want something elegant and unique. We'll be showcasing an assortment of designs that combine the best ideas of earlier periods, developing them for consumers of today through the eyes of the most recognised and respected furniture appraisers in the world, Leigh and Leslie Keno.



The entrance hall of this luxurious Dubai villa features a leather bench designed by Wajih Nakkash, who was also responsible for the interiors; Japanese rice paper fabric creates a subtle division into the lounge area.



A bronze custom-made chandelier dominates the staircase; old lithographs of Lebanon by artist David Roberts frame the window, below which two Kenneth Cobonpau stools have been placed.



Eden Series center tables in brass by Boca do Lobo



Walking Sticks table for Studio A



Studio A's Wish paper weight

**How has the attitude towards design changed in the UAE, since you first arrived in Dubai?**

It has evolved over the years and people's tastes have shifted from neoclassical designs to more eclectic and unique combinations. Recently, blending the inherited treasures with collected souvenirs of global travellers has become more apparent in the design world. When they ask us to design and create spaces, our clients seek modern rooms with a traditional twist – telling their personal story and reflecting their personality.

The design and art market has also drastically evolved since I first arrived... it was actually non-existent at the time. The Gulf region has witnessed a shift in its artistic and cultural landscape, with numerous museums and galleries being built across the region, and year-round exhibitions such as Downtown Design, Art Dubai, Design Days Dubai and the SIKKA Art Fair. There is no doubt that Dubai is determined to make itself a world-class cultural centre.

**What do you think about the upcoming Dubai Design District (d3) and the many new architecture courses offered by Dubai's universities?**

I think d3 is a great project that will see much success. It will be a hub dedicated to young and upcoming designers where they will be able to promote and showcase their work, but also a solid base for established brands and artists to interact with international influences.

For the longest time, foreign architecture firms have led some of the most notable projects in the UAE, but there are many young and upcoming designers in the region who have the talent to be the next architects of Dubai's projects. I believe it is great that many universities in the UAE now offer design and architecture courses, to allow these young designers to promote their work and creativity.

**What are your thoughts on Expo 2020 and its effects on Dubai's evolution as a hospitality hub?**

There is no doubt that Dubai will over-deliver during Expo 2020. Many industries will benefit from Dubai hosting this event, and in fact we are already feeling the benefits with the real estate market picking up. Expo 2020 will provide a massive boost to our city's economy over the long term. The new property legislation in place also means that foreigners are willing to invest more in their furniture, since they now have a solid base in Dubai as opposed to being assigned to furnished apartments or temporary housing. Nakkash Gallery has greatly benefited from this change.

Dubai has already established itself as a leading tourism hotspot. In conjunction with this growth, the hospitality market has evolved tremendously over the last 30 years. With Expo 2020 there has been significant additional ongoing investment in tourism infrastructure, and Dubai will continue to climb the global tourism rankings and expand the hospitality industry.

**What are your main inspirations when designing an interior?**

There is a strong presence of nature in my creations, as it is my main source of inspiration. Everything, from the colour palette to inviting natural light seeping inside through a series of glass additions, is inspired by it. I also start my creative process by understanding the character and personal lifestyle of my clients, which helps me find my own style. I make it a point to incorporate their personality and taste, their individuality and style, to provide them with a space that speaks to them. I always think about what makes them feel relaxed and take their needs into consideration.

I like to think of my spaces as an oasis where one can unwind after a long day. I always opt for neutral colours that give the room a soothing and relaxing feel. In all my interior design projects I always try to use daylight as the primary



Low Amber and Cobalt vases from Global Views



SeaX armchair designed by Jean-Marie Massaud for Dedon



Theodore Alexander's Reveal desk

source of illumination, as natural light can completely transform a room, enhance an existing colour palette or simply open up more space.

**How do you mix your Italian education with your Lebanese roots and UAE experience into your own designs?**

My Lebanese roots and Italian education are intertwined: both Mediterranean cultures have a lot in common. Living and studying in Italy greatly impacted me, not only as a designer but also as a person. I studied in Florence, a city with so much culture and history... I saw the city as an open museum with endless sources of inspiration. The Italian methodology of design is unlike any other: it really emphasises the concept and the essence of a project, and everything must revolve and fall in line with the initial idea.

**Outdoor furniture is one of your specialties, and you were the first to bring Dedon to Dubai. Why have you chosen to give special attention to this sector of the market?**

When I was first introduced to the *Daydream* collection by Dedon I instantly knew that the outdoor living sector had big potential in the UAE market. Inspired by *1001 Arabian Nights*, a four-poster bed was created with an unusual shape reminiscent of a flying carpet, and I could visualise the collection

in Dubai – whether in private gardens or on the beautiful sandy beaches of the city's luxury hotels. Although we can only enjoy the outdoor season for a few months in this country, why not enjoy it on unique luxury outdoor furniture?

Most homes in the UAE have gardens, but homeowners do not enjoy the outdoor space to the fullest. It does not suffice to have nice landscaping: one must create a comfortable and inviting seating area, to enjoy and spend more time outside. Despite the harsh summers and humid months, people still choose to spend more time outside. Living in the UAE, people long for good weather, so as soon as that time of the year comes along, people look forward to sitting outdoors. Outdoor spaces have been more in demand, as more and more rooftop lounges and outdoor cafes are opening in Dubai.

**Your son and daughter work with you. Is establishing a family business a goal you always had?**

It was not something I had planned, but it makes me proud to know that my children have chosen to follow in my footsteps. They understand the business more than any other person I could call a colleague, as they've grown up with it. It is also great to have them work with me because they breathe new life and new ideas into the business. 