

The Art of Sustainability

The focus on eco-efficient and clean-tech practices seems to now have an even higher profile, following the recent Masdar Future Energy Summit, part of Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week (ADSW).

The construction of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) headquarters in Masdar City was one of the highlights of ADSW.

Architects Woods Bagot created the design concept for the 31,983-square metre multi-use complex, which is the first office building in the capital to receive a four-Pearl Estidama Construction Rating certificate from the Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council. The rating sets a new benchmark for sustainable design.

Brookfield Multiplex won the contract to design and construct the innovative eco-building that features some 1000 square metres of rooftop photovoltaic panels.

The multi-use pioneering building will be ready for occupation within the next few months.

The UAE remains keen to be at the forefront of novel new eco developments – from the hosting of the UAE's first solar-powered car race to being the base city for the maiden round-the-world solar-powered air flight.

Pioneering pilots Bertrand Piccard and André Borschberg are currently in the country preparing for this pioneering flight that should take them on an historic globe-circling flight, starting and ending in Abu Dhabi.

Meanwhile, leading American office furniture designer and manufacturer Herman Miller has moved into a swish new Middle East office in Dubai Marina, furnished with the company's innovative Living Office collection that reflects the new way in which we work and the environment that we need to make us more productive, comfortable, efficient...

The range that reflects the new office landscape will be officially launched to the design community in early February.

Scandinavian brand H&M, best known for stylish high street clothing, is now making inroads into our local furniture store mix with the opening of the first H&M Home store in the region.

Evelina Kravaev Söderberg, H&M Home's head of design, has been in Dubai for the pre-opening preparations of the boutique, which is scheduled to open in Deira City Centre and then in Abu Dhabi. Further stores in other parts of our sprawling city are also on the drawing board. The H&M concept is similar to that of the highly successful Zara Home model.

Cyril Zammit, the sophisticated design aficionado behind Design Days Dubai (DDD) – the region's only collectible design fair – is gearing up for the opening of the 2015 edition, which opens on 16 March.

With participation from 44 international galleries from 20 countries, the fourth annual edition of DDD is poised to be yet another coup for Dubai, on its path to being an important design destination. DDD will include a number of regional and world premieres, including the Liquid Glacial acrylic table by Zaha Hadid, being presented by David Gill Galleries... 

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Clockwise: Zaha Hadid, Evelina Kravaev Soderberg and Cyril Zammit



PHOTOGRAPHY: UKRANGAWDE

Group Editor Catherine Belbin

Global Design Ambassador

Cyril Zammit, the humble visionary behind Design Days Dubai – the Middle East and South Asia's only collectible design fair – reveals his secrets to success and explains how the international design scene is changing.

– TEXT: JOANNE MOLINA –

From his first job in Prague where he learned the art of cultural diplomacy to his days in Switzerland working at the Montreux Jazz Festival, Zammit has always been at the centre of the best and brightest cultural programming.

So it was no surprise when Benedict Floyd, co-founder of Art Dubai, approached him to launch Design Days Dubai. Since 2012 Zammit has been bringing the world's best designers to the event. This year he continues with the fourth edition (16-20 March), featuring an international line-up of 44 renowned exhibitors from 20 countries at 'The Venue' next to the Burj Khalifa. He generously spoke with us about the future of Dubai and the future of design.

What is your design leadership philosophy and how has it changed over the years?

My personal philosophy has always been to connect people worldwide. There are great benefits to seeing innovators, creators and curators come together. Connecting designers and professionals with the same taste results in magic.

How has the business of design changed in the last ten years?

There has been an international 'weaving' of the design scene. No longer do designers limit their aesthetics to their nationalities or trends. You will find a boutique in Tokyo that hired Italian designers to create a window display that remains true to their ethos yet attracts the Japanese market.

Did you foresee the incredible success of Design Days Dubai when you accepted your position?

There is a much larger understanding of design, an appreciation of the process and learning more, and looking beyond the price tag. When Design Days Dubai started in March 2012, I wanted visitors to be curious, and to explore the non-industrial side of product design. The vision hasn't changed, only the methods. Then we launched 'Design Stories'. Now in its third season, the annual regional roadshow travels to key cities in the region and hosts talks, panel discussions and presentations at various cultural institutions.

Why the interest in design?

Design always appealed to me because of its timelessness and practicality. I appreciate the amount of physical labour it takes to produce a piece that you are able to touch, feel and use, and then the following day place on a pedestal and make a museum piece.

Who are your greatest design influences?

From a design historical point of view, I would stick to the 'old' classic Scandinavian school – mainly Arne Jacobsen, Poul Henningsen and Alvar Aalto with their pure lines and hard work on minimalism. When it comes to inspiration, I would name Alexander von Vegesack, who created the Vitra Design Museum.

Can you discuss your personal design collection?

My design collection indirectly reflects various parts of my life. I started collecting back in 2007 because I fell in love with a piece and was able to afford it.

One of my two favourite pieces in my place is my clay chair by Dutch designer Maarten Baas that I bought back in 2007 – right at the moment he rose to fame. The second is a light shade by renowned Korean designer Kwangho Lee. Kwangho came to the first edition of Design Days Dubai with Belgian design gallery Victor Hunt. Kwangho participated in the public programme and produced a light shade through his weaving technique, using camel leather provided by Al Khaznah Tannery in Abu Dhabi.

Can you offer your thoughts on design and architecture in Dubai and the Middle East?

Both have changed since I have lived here. There is a growing group of architects and designers that stay away from all that shines and allures, and are geared towards understated materials whose quality remains the primary focus. Recently I have visited two neighbouring structures in Ajman, one the Amna bint Ahmed Al Ghurair mosque and the Al Zorah pavilion facing the mangroves. Those two buildings are primary examples of a shift in urban planning, and I believe we will be seeing more.

How will this year's show surprise visitors?

No revolution, but evolution this year. I am honoured to welcome iconic design gallery David Gill with two magnificent tables by Zaha Hadid, as well as a brand new design gallery, Chamber NYC (USA) will be showcasing a great selection of objects by Studio Job. Visitors will enjoy the London-based Gallery FUMI's premiere in the Middle East. There will also be the world premiere of an installation by Commonplace Studio (NL) presented by Victor Hunt DesignArt Dealer (Brussels). Guests will also discover emerging talents from China and Taiwan. There has been an emergence of Emirati talents and we are very proud to have Aljoud Lootah unveiling her new collection.

What will the new 'design capitals' be in the next 20 years?

London has emerged as a centre of design, as has the Netherlands with the great Eindhoven Academy; Beirut will play a good role very soon, and Dubai shows great signs of joining the club.

How would you like to be remembered?

Do I need to be remembered? Besides someone with a natural propensity to remain discreet, maybe as one who passed by and connected great minds.

What is the best advice that you have received about creativity and development?

That good design lasts. When you are going through the list of iconic product design creations, they are timeless. 



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