

From paper to felt

ALJOUD LOOTAH TELLS US WHAT INSPIRED HER FIRST FULL FURNITURE COLLECTION



Lootah's new range was inspired by origami



The collection is titled Oru, meaning 'to fold'



Aljoud Lootah

Emirati designer Aljoud Lootah was previously known for her Niftee brand, which delivered graphic design, interior design and corporate gift solutions. Her first dabble in the public eye was at Design Days Dubai in 2013, with her Unity Stool, a wooden stool inspired by geometric forms and umbra shading. With all five pieces of the Unity Stool sold, Lootah realised that her passion lay in furniture design and decided to one giant leap into the creative field.

"When I was designing the Unity Stool, I felt that this was the direction

I wanted to go in. It felt more me, I felt like I could be more creative with product design and it was nice to see how I could turn 2D product design into the tree-dimensional," says Lootah.

She adds: "So it was really nice to actually work with that and after the Unity Stool was done, I was working on collaborations and commissions with different companies and organisations that were government and non-government to create tailor-made or tailor-designed products that would be suitable as VIP gifts. So I worked on some book-ends and things like that."

Having firmly decided on a new, per-

haps more focused, artistic direction, Lootah decided to put an end to the Niftee brand and establish a new studio of her namesake. In order to introduce the budding chapter in her career life, Lootah realised that it would be best to let her work speak for itself. Lootah would establish the Aljoud Lootah brand with a complete range of furniture pieces.

"I started sketching some ideas and going through different concept developments and phases of design and it all came down to the fact that I really love geometric shapes and origami and things like that. So I thought, okay, I'll work in the environment that I'm very



The designer says she likes to work with her hands



The collection consists of teak wood, copper and felt



Inside Lootah's sketchbook

comfortable with to be more productive and more creative, so I started just by folding paper and folding paper all day long," says Lootah.

The Dubai-based designer explains that she had only a basic understanding of origami before tuning into the art form more seriously. Inspired by the Japanese culture of design, art and architecture, even noting Shigeru Ban as a source of inspiration, Lootah found the traditional art of paper folding to be the ideal foundation for her new range-Oru, which can be translated from Japanese to English as 'to fold.'

"I started folding, folding, folding until I would get to the shape that I thought would work and I would then modify it to make it a functional object," Lootah explains.

She later adds: "I really like working

with my hands a lot, even with the Unity Stool, I was sanding the stool and airbrushing it. I feel there is so much that you can do with your own hands and it reminds of the old Emirati crafts. So I just sat down and tried to see what I could come up with."

While she would always sketch something out first with the idea of a lamp or shelf in mind, it wouldn't be until she started folding that the product would take on its ultimate form and shape.

The new collection, Oru, consists of four products: a table lamp, a chair, a decorative mirror and a cabinet and shelving unit. Each is a limited edition pieces with only five pieces of each available. While Lootah has decided to go with soft, pastel colours such as egg-white and pistachio, she says that

clients can customise their colour options to go with bolder, brighter fabrics.

The collection's material palette consists of Kvadrat fabric, teak wood and copper. Lootah adds: "I had the initial idea of using the felt fabric and the wood structure, but I wasn't sure which type of wood to use. So I gathered four or five types of wood as samples and posted photos of them on Instagram and told my followers to choose one. Most of the votes went to the teak wood option and that's how I decided to go that route.

"I think the soft colours contrast the teak wood very well, because the teak wood is darker and it creates a soft difference," says Lootah.

While the pieces are still being produced, Lootah plans to reveal the final designs at this year's Design Days Dubai. According to the designer, she had always wanted to be a part of the trade fair and while she had previously exhibited the highly successful Unity Stool, this will be her first time showing an entire range.

Lootah is looking forward to this year's Design Days Dubai, explaining that she hopes the general reaction to the Oru range echoes the positive response the Unity Stool received years ago. "These pieces," explains Lootah, "because of the materials used and the whole design, would be at a higher price, but I'm hoping they would be received as well as the Unity Stool, but you never know with these things!"