



DESERT DISCOVERIES

SPONSORED BY SURFACE, DESIGN DAYS DUBAI RETURNS THIS MARCH TO ENLIVEN THE BURGEONING DESIGN CULTURE IN THE REGION. ARLENE HIRST INVESTIGATES. PORTRAIT BY RYAN CARTER.



(TOP TO BOTTOM) Meltdown chairs by Tom Price. ECAL student pieces produced by Bernardaud and Swarovski. Sheep by Peter Boonsermsuwong. Staff and gallerists discussing a Lathe series seat by Sebastian Brajkovic.



PHOTOS: COURTESY DESIGN DAYS DUBAI.



“The book is open; it’s still new,” says Cyril Zammit, director of Design Days Dubai, on the future of the newest design-art fair, which holds its second edition from March 18 to 21. The festival is the first event dedicated to collectible design in the Middle East and was conceived by the organizers of Art Dubai, which has, since launching in 2007, helped place the United Arab Emirates on the art-world map. Dubai is now home to 50 art galleries—two of which, Green Art Gallery and Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, exhibited at Art Basel 43 last summer.

For organizers of the nascent fair, design seemed to be the logical next step. “We’re creating a hub, a catalyst to attract designers and galleries to come here,” says Zammit, who once headed HSBC Private Bank’s Middle East marketing efforts. The bank also sponsored Design Miami, giving him the chance to work with founders Craig Robins and Ambra Medda. He later worked in Abu Dhabi for a tourism-development project.

In its first year, Design Days Dubai hosted 22 galleries—including the top-tier Nilufar from Milan, London’s Carpenters Workshop Gallery, and Paris’ BSL, as well as Dubai’s own La Galerie Nationale—in a spacious, air-conditioned tent in front of the famous Burj Khalifa, the world’s tallest building. Sole U.S. representative R 20th Century attended and found that demand for 21st-century

design trumped interest in vintage wares. After selling mainly contemporary pieces by David Wiseman and Jeff Zimmerman, co-owner Zesty Meyers says the gallery will return this year and show major pieces by Wendell Castle. “I think the region is ready for us,” Meyers says. “It will grow into this really big thing.” There were added benefits, too, including the discovery of Canadian design collective Oeuffice’s ziggurat boxes. Now, in collaboration with the Carwan Gallery, R 20th Century represents Oeuffice in New York.

“This is a fair of discovery,” Zammit says. “Saudis and Kuwaitis have very sophisticated tastes, and they are very into 21st-century design.” The 2013 event will include 29 galleries, including nine from the UAE and the Middle East, and will showcase the work of emerging Middle Eastern designers such as Khalid Shafar and Karen Chekerdjian. From the United States, Industry Gallery and Salon 94 will attend; from Paris, Perimeter Art and Design gallery will feature new work from West Africa, a highlight of the show. “We’ll have galleries from every part of the world,” Zammit says, “except for the North and South Poles.” designdaysdubai.ae



(TOP TO BOTTOM) Design Days Dubai director Cyril Zammit. The bookstore at the fair. From left (in front), a pine bench, stainless-steel and wood table, and pine chair, all by Jaehyo Lee; from left (in back), a beech cabinet and beech partition, both by Jeoungsup Lee.

