

# Fair Gain

Exhibitors from around the globe, including six from Paris, head to a design expo in a growing market: Dubai.

BY ALLIE WEISS



As a relatively new design destination, Dubai stands out from its counterparts Miami, Milan, New York, Paris, and London. “The market is expecting us to show more contemporary design than classic design,” says Cyril Zammit, fair director of Design Days Dubai. “This is not necessarily the trend anywhere else.”

Of the 34 galleries presenting at the third edition of Design Days Dubai, running March 17 through 21, Zammit estimates that about 90 percent are showing contemporary work. But the area’s taste for the new may be the only thread uniting the diverse region. “Dubai is like New York—the city is made up of over 200 nationalities that live and work as part of this multicultural melting pot,” Zammit says. “This characteristic means that I’m in a position to introduce new exhibitions or design galleries to the region, which may have a totally different style and taste from what the public is used to seeing.”

The multifaceted nature of the UAE’s design community gives the fair organizers a chance to bring in a wide roster of exhibitors, from South Africa’s Southern Guild to Vienna’s Wiener Silber Manufactur to Coalesce Design Studio from Pakistan. A new feature of the fair, called Discover, spotlights one country; this year, Design Days Dubai will partner with the UAE’s Institut Français for a focus on France. Paris-based galleries Yves Gastou, S. Bensimon, Nextlevel, Gosserez, and Ymer & Malta are exhibiting at the fair for the first time, joining the Paris- and London-based Carpenters Workshop Gallery, a third-time exhibitor.

For Valerie Maltaverne, founder of Ymer & Malta, showing at the fair gives the gallery a chance to reach a key international audience. “Dubai is a crossroad between Europe, the Middle East, and Asia,” she says. “It attracts dynamic, well-educated, and wealthy people.” Ymer & Malta will bring two pieces by French designer Benjamin Graindorge to Dubai: his Fallen Tree bench, which features a tangle of oak-carved branches on one end and a streamlined seat anchored by a glass leg on the other, and Sofascape, a sofa with an oak frame and 82 leather cushions that users can slide into various configurations.

Though the geographic range of the fair’s exhibitors is staggering, Zammit believes that Dubai’s collectors care far more about the design objects than their countries of origin. “The people in Dubai are really curious,” he says. “They won’t necessarily look [at an object] and say, ‘Oh, this is from the U.S., this is from France.’ Because this is an emerging market, they look at the object, they like the object, and they purchase the object.”



Studio Rolf.fr's Cutted cabinet (2013), shown by Netherlands-based Galerie Judy Straten. (OPPOSITE) Benjamin Graindorge's Fallen Tree bench (2011), exhibited by Paris gallery Ymer & Malta.