

Collectible Furniture comes to Design Days Dubai



As the Director of the prestigious Design Days Dubai, Cyril Zammit has almost singlehandedly brought collectible furniture and design to the forefront of consumer consciousness in the region. Now in its third year, the fair is set to be bigger than ever before.

understand what the artist was trying to say or what the cultural context is in order to appreciate it—shape, aesthetics, materials, etc. speak to everyone.”

Design Days Dubai, the only such fair of its kind in the world, brings together galleries from all over the globe to display and sell limited edition collectible furniture and objects. What sets it apart is its focus on contemporary design whereas other shows in Miami, Paris, or Basel feature mostly vintage pieces.

When it first started in 2012 the overwhelming response took everyone by surprise; by the following year, visitor numbers had grown to 10,000 over the four days. This year’s event, which will run in Dubai

from March 17 to 21, is bigger than before, featuring 34 galleries including never-seen-before design studios from Pakistan, Algeria, and even China. “It’s great to see limited edition pieces coming out of China,” observes Zammit with a smile, “especially since we’re



The fair is also a great opportunity for local talents to come forward and hone their skills in specific workshops that will run each day. There is a mentorship programme for students to have a 20-minute one-on-one session with a designer to go through their portfolio and give them pointers.

Zammit believes that although there are good courses available to design students here, there is still room for improvement. The biggest challenge, however, is a lack of production facilities. “The best designs come from places like France and Holland because they have an entire industry of skilled craftsmen to back up the designers. But over here, designers don’t have enough artisans to work with. We have all the necessary industries such as glass, wood, plastic and aluminium but at the moment they are mass-producing objects. If we could get them to pause once a year and produce a designer collection, we’d be off to a good start. Another idea would be to set up workshops with all the necessary tools so designers could buy a membership and experiment by themselves.”

“It is important for Bahrain to support local designers”, he concludes. “They understand the local culture, and as they gain international recognition they will become ambassadors for region.” **AH Design Days Dubai takes place on 17-21 March 2014 in Dubai**

Looking around Al Riwaq Art Space in Adliya on a short visit to Bahrain, Cyril Zammit is amazed at how much the art scene here has evolved in a few short years. This supports his belief that the GCC is a ripe market for collectible furniture.

“When we saw the response to Art Dubai in 2007,” says Zammit, “we knew that people were ready. People are investing a lot in luxury property and they’re buying expensive artwork for their walls, so why would they want cheap furniture to go with it? There is a clear demand for good design in the region, as evidenced by events such as Beirut Design Week, Saudi Design Week, and Bahrain’s own recent International Design Week.”

“Besides, design is even more appealing than artwork because you can interact with it in a way that you cannot do with a painting. You can touch it, sit on it, or if you prefer you can put it on a pedestal as a showpiece. Design is more accessible because you don’t have to



Cyril Zammit,
director of Design Days Dubai

so used to China being the champion of mass manufacture.”

He describes the fair as a one-stop shop for collectors to sample aesthetics from all over the world and pick out unique items for their home. “Of course there are some expensive pieces, but you also have very affordable pieces at the fair, and sometimes going for a designer piece is not much more expensive than what you would get at a furniture shop. You can even commission a piece—if you see something you like but you want it bigger or smaller or in a different colour, you can speak to the artisan directly, who will then create something just for you, all within your budget.”

Zammit also believes that design is a good investment. “Imagine you’d asked Zaha Hadid to design an entryway for you back in the days when nobody had even heard of her. It would be worth millions today. This fair gives buyers the opportunity to back upcoming designers and purchase something that will eventually appreciate in value.”