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How to stand out

The growing importance of design quality in creating competitive advantage

Over the last 25 years, Dubai has witnessed an unprecedented growth that captured the world's attention and turned it into an international entrepreneurial hub, attracting highly-respected companies from around the globe.

What is truly remarkable, though, is the Emirate's limitless ability to adapt, evolve and reinvent itself in the most creative ways. Dubai, in essence, managed to distil the best of what the east and the west have to offer to create a high-tech oasis in the desert.

Nowadays, Dubai's skyline is that of a super-sleek metropolis, boasting some of the world's most iconic contemporary buildings, with Abu Dhabi sharing the glory. From SOM Architects' Burj Khalifa to Zaha Hadid's Opera House and Jean Nouvel's much anticipated Louvre Museum, the landscape of the Emirates is constantly growing. Furthermore, Dubai's successful bid for the 2020 Expo has skyrocketed property values and made competition in the property market fiercer than ever, which in turn has driven developers, architects and investors to focus on an often neglected aspect: quality.

In a region where 60,000 hotel rooms are pipelined for the next six years in addition to 15,000 houses by the end of

this year, 17,000 by 2015 and 8,000 more by 2016, quality becomes pivotal to gain a competitive advantage and raise the commercial value of a property.

When the standards are set so high, quality refers to much more than just the type of materials used to construct a building. It is about the design and the architecture, the different elements used to furnish and equip living spaces

This is where original design comes in. When we talk about original design, we mostly refer to this defining factor that turns a building from walls and plaster to a living space with character and a unique ambience. Original design refers to craftsmanship and innovation, products that are beautiful and functional, that have been created with passion and thoughtfulness, that are designed to withstand the test of time.

Original design is reflected in the choice of materials in lighting, flooring, kitchen and bathrooms, as well as the use of colours and the pieces that furnish living spaces. This is in line with the global trend of clients and developers who are demanding a more integrated experience that seamlessly connects the outside to the inside, as they realise that each element of design should involve the same process of selection and refinement as the building itself – be it a private residence, hotel, office tower, an

art museum or an industrial building.

Many western countries are taking this trend to the next level. Mandates are being put in place to ensure that from the planning phase of a new building the contractor, developer, architect, interior designer and end consumer offer their inputs to achieve a holistic approach to the completion of the project.

This design-led approach has been dubbed as 'Integrated whole building design' and it seeks to recognise the interconnectedness of a project's contributors.

World-class buildings need to be matched by world-class interiors, which is why interior designers should be involved from the very first stages of a project. What they bring to the table goes so much beyond merely advising on colour palettes and furniture. The way a building is naturally illuminated, the "smart" technologies that are incorporated, the way furnishings interact with the light patterns and architectural lines, the creation of spaces and corners that serve specific purposes, these are all aspects that can merge into a well-rounded experience only if all the contributors have a solid, unified vision from the outset. ■

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