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ACCEPT NO IMITATIONS

How is authentic design surviving in a market saturated with copies?

With the likes of Fritz Hansen, Herman Miller, Emeco, Vitra and Louis Poulsen descending on Downtown Design at the end of October, many

classic furniture designs will be making an appearance.

With such respected alumni joining the international exhibition for its second year, it's no surprise that the chosen theme is 'original design'. Critics have been quick to point out the irony of this concept in a city where fakes abound. Louis Vuitton does not travel on the Metro, but hop on for just one stop and you'll soon see brown-and-black checkered totes making their daily commute to the office.

There are arguments on both sides of the fence. Of course one cannot beat the history, heritage, craftsmanship and ultimate durability that comes with authentic designs, while others point out that not everyone has the financial means to access such beautiful designs – and why should they be looked down upon?

However, industry professionals admit that copies have become the main competitor to designers and distributors alike. "Production methods are developing and it is becoming easier and easier to copy a product – legally or illegally," warns Pia Knudsen, business area manager at Louis Poulsen, a brand making its debut at Downtown Design this year. "Investing time and resources in developing a new product is an expensive matter for a company, and if half of the sales are 'stolen' by the copies, this turnover will be missing for the development of new products and for paying royalties to the designer."

With advanced manufacturing methods making it easy to reproduce lifelike imitations, consumers



must be made aware of other values that are just as important as aesthetic, if not more so. For returning exhibitor Gaggenau, history and heritage create a far superior product.

"Centuries of manufacturing and innovation have led Gaggenau to become a pioneer in domestic kitchen appliances," says Gaggenau's brand manager Mouad Benmoussa, who heralds the company's 331-year history as truly inimitable. "However, we are lucky to be in such a niche market as you cannot fake a cooker. But even if you could it would not be durable and last decades, or have the strong position, story and heritage that we have, so the value of our original product would never decrease."

There's no denying that copies have created a lucrative market for the unscrupulous manufacturer, and it's an industry that's as real as authentic design.

CONSUMERS MUST BE MADE AWARE OF VALUES JUST AS IMPORTANT AS AESTHETIC

So, rather than focussing on an eddying presence of fakes, it's the consumer we need to focus on – the consumer who could be cheated into buying an imitation instead of an original because of its lifelike similarities.

With this in mind, the design world holds a degree of responsibility when it comes to educating the consumer on the importance of heritage, quality and durability. This is the message that Downtown Design is hoping to spread by championing the superior-quality brands already here in the UAE and those from further afield, including Hansgrohe, Bang & Olufsen, Preciosa and Maffam Freeform.

“One of our main focus areas at Downtown Design is to encourage quality-driven global brands to make their offerings accessible to the Middle East by establishing a presence here,” says fair director Cristina Romelli Gervasoni. “One thing that remains constant among all the brands that are present at Downtown Design is their focus on originality. We want to get the word out about its importance and help people recognise original pieces when they see them, just like a valuable piece of art.”

“Good design, made with passion and creativity, withstands the test of time and ultimately becomes part of a legacy carried down from generation to generation, its value enhanced as time goes by. It is, therefore, the quality of materials, the attention to detail, the superior craftsmanship and the thoughtful design process

that distinguish an original piece from an imitation. But more importantly, it is the distinct feeling that each piece of original design carries the spark of inspiration that originally brought it to life. And that can never be imitated.”

So, what is being done to keep the legacy of authentic design alive? Emeco’s Navy Chair is 70 years old this year and is a great example of durable design. Originally made for use on submarines, it carries a lifelong guarantee – a true tribute to quality craftsmanship. However, it hasn’t been left behind the times. A more recent collaboration with Coca-Cola redefined the famous 77-step manufacturing process to solve a huge environmental problem: recycling. The 111 Navy Chair in red is made from 111 recycled PET bottles. What kind of impact has this had on consumer waste? In the last four years this chair has



**ORIGINAL DESIGN
CARRIES A SPARK
OF INSPIRATION**

2.

1. Louis Poulsen
2. Gaggenau
3. Emeco



3.

used over 13 million bottles, a number that strikes a chord with many eco-conscious consumers.

Louis Poulsen Lighting has been manufacturing Poul Henningsen’s pioneering designs for 100 years. In reaction to Edison’s revolutionary incandescent light bulb, Henningsen’s famous PH Lamp Shade focused on diffusing the harsh glare to create a more pleasing ambience around the room. While this lighting philosophy is still very relevant today, and his ultra-modern designs are seamless in contemporary spaces, the muse has advanced.

“We have to make sure that our fixtures will work with new light sources like LED, while maintaining all the good

qualities that the original version had, and this certainly can be a challenge,” says Knudsen. “Take his iconic PH Artichoke that was originally designed for the only existing light source, the incandescent bulb, back in 1958: if we cannot deliver it with LED now, sales will stop within the next year or two.”

“Some designers are very humble towards our legacy and almost scared to come up with designs that are not design-related to the famous PH-lamp,” she adds. “But a new design should not be a new version of a PH-lamp. A new design reflects its time – keeping in mind the DNA of a Louis Poulsen product. That is good lighting.” Visit *Downtown Design from October 28-31 at The Venue, Downtown Dubai.*