



Creative Fair

## Designated Design

This October brings the second edition of Downtown Design, an event by Art Dubai that showcases original design by international artists. *TQatar* speaks with Cristina Romelli Gervasoni, the fair's director, about why Dubai has become so relevant to the international design scene.

BY REBECCA ANN PROCTOR



AFTER A successful first run last October, Downtown Design is back for a second showing, this year with the theme 'Original'. The fair will be showcasing companies and brands that define the evolution of contemporary design through hospitality, residential, office and product design for the region's many developers, contractors, interior designers and architects. "The way people live, work and travel is undergoing a radical transformation today," says Cristina Romelli Gervasoni, Director of Downtown Design. "This is reflected in the creations of the world's foremost designers, and is the single most important driver of the innovations we are witnessing worldwide and which we bring to Downtown Design every year." The fair will feature a host of leading global

designers showcasing new collections and exclusive collaborations. These include Herman Miller, Fritz Hansen, Carl Hansen, Bang & Olufsen, Tai Ping, Lasvit, Golran, De Vecchi, Elica, Gaggenau, Hansgrohe and Vitra, among others. Through names like these the fair aims to open up business opportunities for the GCC, particularly in the realm of public facilities and commercial residential property — something that, with the region's rapid growth, is much needed.

While the prospects for Downtown Design now look very exciting, when it launched last year many art and design enthusiasts wondered how the fair would differ from Design Days Dubai, another fair that takes place each year during Art Dubai and is now in its third run. What did this new fair offer the region that Design Days Dubai didn't already? "Although both are owned and managed by the same team behind Art Dubai, they are very different fairs," says Gervasoni. "Downtown Design is a curated commercial fair showcasing international brands that produce limitless pieces of design, targeting industry professionals and high-end consumers. Having all these amazing companies under one roof is something that has never been done before in the region, and it is exactly what makes this fair so unique: it is the only place where design enthusiasts can discover the latest global trends and innovations that are shaping the world of design." Design Days Dubai, on the other hand, is led more by the art galleries featured throughout the fair.

**UNDER ONE ROOF:** The Downtown Design Fair 2014 will feature a host of leading global designers showcasing new collections and exclusive collaborations. Images shown are from the first edition of the Fair held in 2013.



COURTESY OF DOWNTOWN DESIGN



**ABOVE:** The making of the Wishbone chair at the Craftsman booth during the 2014 fair. **BELOW:** Upholstered deck chair by Theodore Alexander

Downtown Design is thus better placed to bring global brands to the Middle East. Both fairs are held in a boutique-like ambiance allowing guests to easily peruse the multitude of interesting objects. The two serve different purposes, but both ultimately aim to establish Dubai as a global design destination.

Downtown Design features a greater number of international designers than up-and-coming local names, but attempts to balance the two with educational and commercial scope. "We are responding to the UAE and GCC markets' growing thirst for the best in global design," says Gervasoni. "It is estimated that construction deals in the UAE will reach \$315 billion, which will significantly drive business in the interior and industrial design sectors. Growth in residential and commercial developments is expected to continue across the region, with Qatar and Saudi Arabia slated to spend almost as much as the UAE over the next few years." Thus the role of Downtown Design is to bring together major players in the design industry to help meet the demand for high-end design in the region. But as Gervasoni underlines, the fair is also keen to highlight the work of emerging local talent, as it did last year with the Abu Dhabi tannery Al Khaznah and its new division Atelier AK, which produces camel-leather upholstered furniture on an international scale.

Renowned Czech designer and manufacturer of bespoke light fittings Lasvit will be exhibiting at the fair for the first time. The company has won many awards for its innovative glass art installations and kinetic sculptures. "This is the right time for us to be in the Middle East market," says a spokesperson for the company. "The region is experiencing unprecedented growth in the hotel, residential and commercial sectors, and Downtown Design provides the ideal environment to showcase our glass art installations to a growing number of customers here who are after original design in lighting and other sectors." It's an impressive international line-up of design heavyweights for



such a young country. But in the end, the fair is about providing a creative edge to the region. "Exposure, exposure, exposure," says Gervasoni. "The fair is the best opportunity for emerging and aspiring designers from the region to meet with the world's most respected brands, to learn from the best, and experience first-hand what product design, craftsmanship and innovation can bring to commercial design." It certainly adds another platform to the many that have been established in the UAE to honor design, under the wider umbrella of support for the arts and creativity.

But Gervasoni has an even larger vision. "We believe there is an emerging culture of design in the region that we have a responsibility and opportunity to nurture," she says. "Downtown Design hopefully helps to shed light on the fact that quality-driven pieces can be part of everyday life," she adds, recalling how, growing up in Italy, design was second nature. "I still use my grandmother's chairs today, and I can do that because of their innate quality and originality," she says. An original design piece, in her view, carries with it the brand's ethos and heritage: "It is the innovation and craftsmanship that goes into designing that perfect glass or couch. And that cannot be replicated." Downtown Design takes place from October 28-31, at The Venue in Downtown Dubai. For more information visit [www.downtowndesign.com](http://www.downtowndesign.com). ▀

