

What Irthi did next

UAE women's craft initiative debuts new product collection in Sharjah and Dubai



Hajar Chairs by Architecture and Other Things and Irthi, photography by Moez Achour.

Fresh from the debut of its first product collection at London Design Festival in September, Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council hits another major milestone this autumn – three major exhibitions across two cities in the United Arab Emirates.

Two of these will be devoted to introducing Irthi's inaugural product collection to the organisation's homeland – via an exhibition at Sharjah's Al Bait Hotel and Dubai Design Week. The third, FashCultivate at the 1971 Design Space in Sharjah, will bring to life Irthi's groundbreaking research into how date palm waste can be used to create sustainable biotextiles as part of a circular design economy.

UAE product premieres

The debut product line has stemmed from the work of Irthi's Bidwa Social Development Programme in Dibba Al Hisn, UAE. Here, Irthi aims to give women artisans practising traditional handicrafts such as talli (hand braiding) and safeefah

(palm-frond weaving) the opportunity to explore their craft in a modern context – providing the training and market access they need to generate a sustainable income and achieve professional and social empowerment.

Irthi's first range of crafted design objects is the result of two initiatives: Design Labs and Crafts Dialogue, both of which are founded on the creative potential of collaborations. The initiatives connect Irthi's 40 trainees and artisans employed by Irthi's Bidwa Social Development Programme with designers from nations as diverse as Palestine, Pakistan, Japan, the UK and Spain, to handcraft products such as dune-like leather fruit bowls, intricately woven wall tapestries and gigantic misbah prayer beads.



Left to right: Bidwa trainee practicing Safeefah techniques, photography by Moez Achour.

For the first time, this November, Irthi will be exhibiting at Dubai Design Week's Downtown Design, showcasing their debut product line between 12 and 15 November 2019 on the Dubai Design District (d3) waterfront. Designed using wood and camel leather to create a unique display environment, the exhibition will take visitors on a journey from raw material to the process of design and the making of the new collection, incorporating details of the rich hand-making heritage of Sharjah and the UAE.

Meanwhile, Irthi's exhibition at the Al Bait Hotel in Sharjah, held from October 31 - January 31, will be a more intimate affair. Here, products from Irthi's debut line will weave themselves into the library space of the new luxury hotel – a 10,000sqm collection of 53 guest rooms in the Heart of Sharjah. Developed from historic manor houses in Sharjah's oldest district, Al Bait (which means 'The House'), presents a perfect opportunity to see the new pieces in a domestic setting.

Fabric of the future

For Fashcultivate, Irthi funded and directed research by Dr Sandra Piesik, who is working to create viable biotextiles from date-palm leaves. On show at 1971 Design Space in Sharjah between 2 November 2019 and 8 February 2020, will be Dr Piesik's research and findings for the first biotextile prototype, exhibited through a selection of large-scale images of four palm varieties – Lulu, Sultana, Khalas and Farthin – under the microscope, revealing the intriguing details of the fibres which cannot be seen by the naked eye.



Left to right: Date palm being used for construction, Liwa Oasis, UAE, 1948 Sir Wifred Thesiger © The Pitt Rivers Museum. Morphology image from Dr Sandra Piesik's research. Images courtesy of Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council.

The project concept originated from Khuloud Thani and Fatma Al Mahmoud, curators of the Fashcultivate exhibition which alongside Dr Piesik's work presents specially commissioned pieces exploring and celebrating the historic and potential role of date palm in design, from seven Gulf-based designers.

Although very different in scope to the two other shows, Fashcultivate similarly reflects Irthi's mission to build sustainable markets by merging new technologies and craft – while preserving the material culture of the Gulf region.

Notes to editors

About Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council

Based in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, and representing both traditional and modern crafts across the MENASEA and Central Asia region, Irthi exists to support the professional and social empowerment of women through craft. Working with partner organisations around the world, the Council aims to provide a fresh narrative for women, by developing new market opportunities and sectors, delivering social development programmes and vocational training, as well as preserving the skills and rich cultural heritage of the UAE for current and future generations through its five initiatives.

Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council is an affiliate of NAMA Women Advancement Establishment, a UAE-wide drive dedicated to the societal and economic elevation of women established under Emiri decree by His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, and chaired by Her Highness Sheikha Jawaher bint Mohammed Al Qasimi, wife of His Highness the Ruler of Sharjah.

Irthi.com

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About Downtown Design

Downtown Design is the Middle East's leading platform for the region's trade professionals to discover high quality, original design. A key event of Dubai Design Week, the region's largest creative festival, the fair annually brings the regional and international design industry together in Dubai, in November, for a dynamic programme of discovery and networking. Presented at a purpose-built destination at the Dubai Design District waterfront overlooking Dubai Creek, Downtown Design's creative direction incorporates large-scale experiential projects commissioned specially for the fair, bespoke café concepts and concept presentations, offering both trade and public visitors an engaging and dynamic experience.

downtowndesign.com

About 1971 Design Space

1971 is a multi-functional design space dedicated to the display and discussion of all forms of contemporary design ranging from graphic, furniture to interior, interactive design and new technologies. With a variety of curated exhibitions and public programmes, 1971 Design Space aims to become a regional and international design hub in the UAE. Working in close proximity with local designers, architects, schools and universities, 1971 Design Space also serves as an informal meeting point and includes a fully serviced cafe for the enjoyment of the public.

1971design.ae

About Al Bait Hotel

Al Bait Hotel is a 5-star luxurious retreat where the traditional and contemporary meet. This Emirati hotel, managed by GHM Hotels, is designed to provide guests with a unique and unrivalled experience of the best Sharjah has to offer. Located in the Heart of Sharjah, the hotel brings to light Sharjah's legacy and thoughtful vision to revive the heritage in the region by the protection and restoration of the historic fabric within the city and the Emirate at large.

Address Heart of Sharjah, Al Mareija, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

ghmhotels.com/en/al-bait-sharjah