

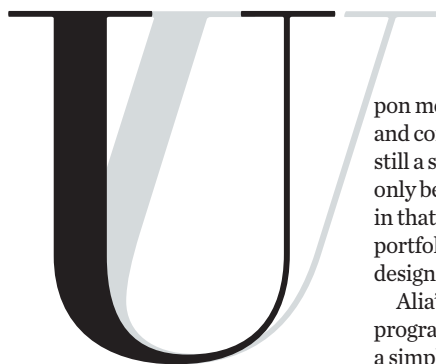
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C O N T E M P O R A R Y
M A J L I S



We catch up with one of the UAE's youngest up-and-coming interior designers, Alia Mazrooei



Above: Alia Mazrooei seated on one of her Moroccan sofas
Right: The steel Moroccan sofa with accompanying metal stools



pon meeting Alia Mazrooei, with her poise, grace and confidence, few people would believe she is still a student. The senior at Zayed University has only been designing professionally for a year, but in that time she has amassed an impressive portfolio and exhibited her work at several top design shows.

Alia's story started with an entrepreneurship program in her university, for which she designed a simple wooden stool, with glass and marble-top

variations. One piece of furniture led to another, and soon after she found herself designing an entire VIP majlis for the 2016 Mirbad Ramadan souq in Abu Dhabi. Reimagining traditional Arabian design through a contemporary lens, the set inserts arabesque patterns into a minimalist frame, which saves space and channels a fluid, airy feel. Paired with simple cushions crafted from suede, leather and linen, and accessorized with the occasional pillow and throw, her majlis created an inviting visiting space which was an instant hit amongst the souq's visitors.

Alia began renting the set for events, and soon was receiving custom orders. Not one to stay still for long, she dove into her next venture: a sleek swing set/chaise lounge/sofa combination for the Festember fair in Abu Dhabi's Mushrif park. The ultimate statement piece, this elaborate outdoor set completely rethinks social seating. She has since ventured into more specific projects, such as a custom-designed jewellery display case for a crafts exhibition. Alia spares no detail at any stage of the design process, from confirming various finishes and lighting options with the client to even doing the styling and touch-up painting herself.

Her limitless creativity and willingness to confront any challenge set her apart as a young designer, as she explores new types of furniture in contrasting styles. "I love making unique pieces," Alia explains. She is also exceptionally dedicated to the creation process, spending countless hours at TechShop, a fabrication and prototyping studio, where she has learnt carpentry, laser cutting, welding and embroidery, among other skills. "Knowing how to physically create furniture enables me to understand the structure, which allows me to better understand the quality," she says. All the tools available at TechShop help her produce prototypes for new pieces, such as a pair of wooden rocking chairs attached on an axle and facing each other, allowing people to maintain a conversation while relaxing.

Alia sources all her materials herself; the marble, metal and fabrics used in her designs all come from different suppliers. She works closely with the manufacturers to be sure that the furniture is built in the right way. "The hardest part is getting the manufacturer to capture the essence of the design. That's the most frustrating thing for me- when the pieces don't turn out as I wanted," she says with a sigh. Spending time at the factories has deepened her appreciation for all the labour the workers put into her furniture, and all her visits to Abu Dhabi's Mussafah industrial area have inspired her senior project: to design an outdoor space which will provide seating and shelter for the workers.

Alia is proudly Emirati, and took much inspiration from an internship with a local designer, which renewed her motivation to follow her dreams. Through participation in events such as Dubai Design Week, Alia has seen that Emiratis have a true place in the design community. "Growing up, you would turn any object over and it would have a Made in India sticker on the back. I'm excited to produce pieces made in the UAE," she enthuses. Design also runs in her blood- her great-grandfather designed boats used for pearl diving.

Alia will soon be completing her degree, and plans to continue studying various aspects of design through internships. When asked why she wants to intern instead of focusing solely on her own company, she replies enthusiastically, "there is so much I still want to learn!" However, she already has a new project lined up for the summer- designing a café interior. Once complete, patrons are sure to find her space the perfect spot to enjoy their coffee, whether it's a traditional ghawwa or a caramel cappuccino.

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