

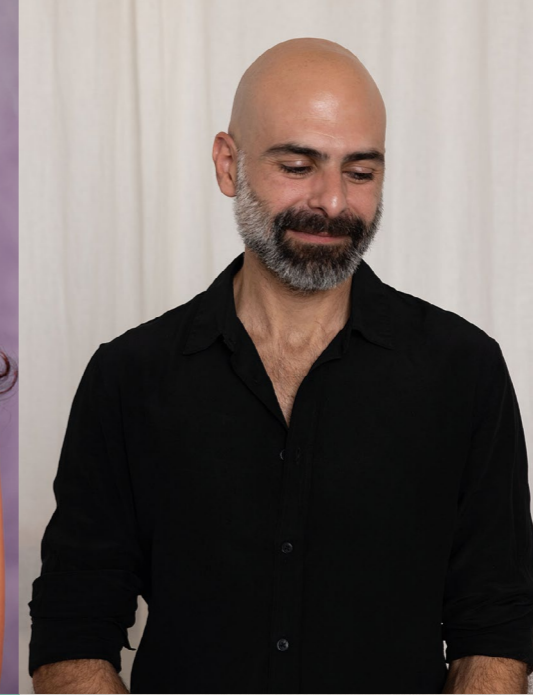
أصوات جديدة

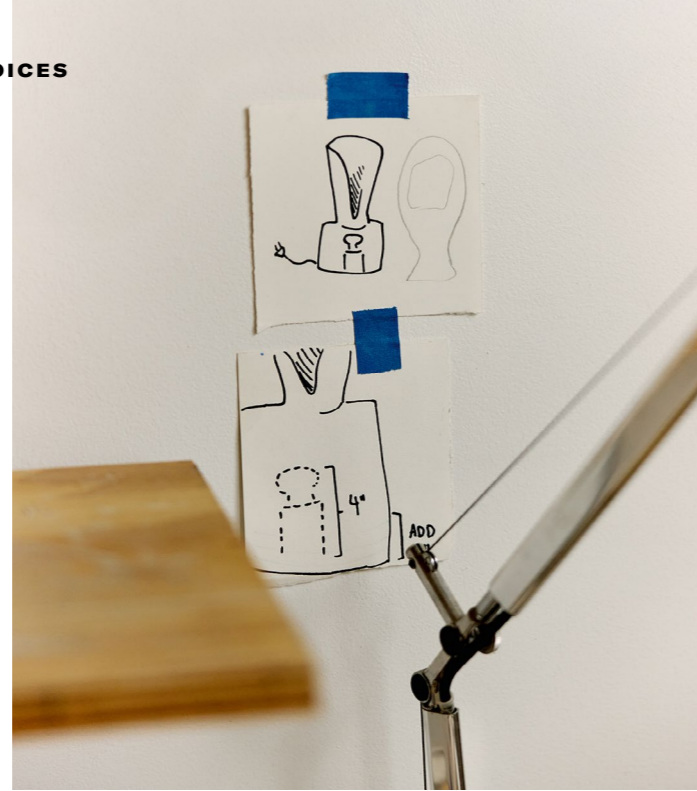
Fusing heritage with bold innovation, a new wave of Arab designers is radically reshaping the global design narrative

ARAB

جديدة

NEW





### TAMARA SOLEM AL-ISSA

Raised in Jeddah, Filipino-Syrian designer Tamara Solem Al-Issa is an emerging sculptor whose works are heavily influenced by Saudi craftsmanship, as well as her own deep-seated longing for Syria, a place she knows only through family stories and photographs. Her ceramics serve as vessels to hold these memories, drawing inspiration from forms, textures and colours found in vernacular architecture and ancient pottery.

Al-Issa aims to reframe ideas about Arab design, moving away from monolithic, orientalist narratives. Instead she highlights the diversity and complexity of the region's heritage by exploring distinctive architectural styles, such as Riyadh's Najdi houses and Damascus's grand brickwork. "My creative process is quite loose and intuitive," she says. "I'm quick to jump into creating prototypes. Most of my sculptures are made of stoneware, but I have worked with gypsum to create larger-scale light fixtures and furniture that wouldn't fit in a kiln."

Al-Issa's artistic practice has developed rapidly over the past three years. She has already exhibited – and taught – at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Riyadh, and led an advanced hand-building course in Beirut. Her latest collection, the Character series, features colourful vases with legs and light fixtures inspired by Catalan sculptor Joan Miró. Crafted in shades of raspberry and apricot, each creation has its own unique personality and story.

Next up is a series of international craft workshops in collaboration with local communities. Al-Issa is also continuing to develop her research project investigating Ottoman architecture and its use of "acoustic jars" – ceramic vessels integrated into places of worship to enhance sound. Her intention is to create small-scale environments in which visitors can experience the intersection of claywork and sound: a project that honours both cultural memory and intangible heritage.

[solemceramics.com](http://solemceramics.com) – MAGHIE GHALI



Sculptor Tamara Solem Al-Issa in her Toronto studio, photographed by Kristina Dittmar. Opposite page: a selection of her stoneware pieces, including signature blue designs

تعمارا العيسى

# زینب کرتان

Zineb Kertane in Paris, with her Bayt El Ma tile system and Bónk olive-wood stools. Photographed by Chloé Le Réste



# سلسی لرزق

Selma Lazrak at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, with pieces from her Sahara collection in walnut wood. Photographed by Michael Wong



Badih Ghanem in his Paris studio, with polished stainless-steel pieces from the Remember Love? collection. Photographed by Chloé Le Reste

بدیع غانم

## ZINEB KERTANE

زينب كرتان

An Algerian raised in France, Zineb Kertane grew up between two realities: the traditional intimacy and warmth of her protective family life and the new and exciting world on her Parisian doorstep, with its myriad inspirations and countless unknowns. It is this dance between two worlds that has shaped her as a person, and as a designer.

"In my practice, I instinctively look for bridges between worlds, and I tell stories that connect them," Kertane explains. "I often start with small, familiar objects that are so integrated in daily rituals that people forget their origins. I like to re-examine them as if seeing them for the first time, documenting and explaining them in detail." An insider's knowledge mixed with an outsider's perspective guides Kertane to share her observations, which are distilled into unique objects and experiences without the trappings of cultural appropriation or superficial detours.

A case in point is Bayt El Ma, a contemporary decorative tiling and water system inspired by the ancestral Islamic traditions of cleansing and purification. Integrating water channels into the tile construction and expressing its flow through a bas-relief design that can be applied anywhere, from places of worship to schools and community hubs, the design won Kertane the Emergent Talent award at the 2024 Arab World Institute Design Prize.

Today, Kertane is busy expanding the manifesto of her studio, Bayt, to invite a broader network of creatives, and embarking on a special project with the acclaimed Iranian-French designer India Mahdavi. "She paved the path for us Arab girls, and I want to do the same." @wshzazou – PRATYUSH SARUP

## SELMA LAZRAK

سلمى لزازك

Moroccan designer and architect Selma Lazrak's journey into design has been profoundly shaped by her early life, which she spent moving between Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, France and Turkey. "I often think about how traditions and memories can coexist in a single object or space," she says. "My work grows out of that mix."

Beginning her career in architecture, restoration and interior design, Lazrak later shifted her focus to the more tactile work of handcrafted furniture, and in 2020 established her own studio in Munich, Germany. Her pieces are imbued with explorations of geometry, cultural layers and landscapes; she is drawn to materials that feel alive, such as stone, wood, metal and clay, which she believes carry a sense of permanence and memory.

For Lazrak, heritage is not static, but a living foundation for new forms and ideas. She frequently champions artisans and works on keeping traditional crafts alive. Her recent Mediterranea collection, a series of stone pieces inspired by the geometry of the old architecture and geography of the Mediterranean basin, is a prime example of this. Presented at Milan's Salone de Mobile in 2024, the series celebrates the raw, sculptural quality of artisanal craft in a world often dominated by manufactured objects.

"Working with stone is humbling; it forces you to listen and to try again," the designer says. "The pieces are mostly made by hand, which gives them the raw presence of sculpture. In today's world, where so much is machine-made, that feels important." selmalazrak.com – M.G

## BADIH GHANEM

Lebanese-French architect and designer Badih Ghanem's work is often about finding stillness amid chaos; his pieces are quietly reflective and meditative, staying with people long after they've left the room.

Born in Beirut and based in Paris, Ghanem works with everyday forms and materials to draw attention to often-overlooked objects, exploring ideas that evoke emotion and memory. "I think my interest in design started as a reaction to growing up in a visually chaotic environment," he says. "I was drawn to simplicity, to calm, and to the idea that design could shape how we feel in subtle but powerful ways.

"Beirut has given me emotion and agility: a fast, instinctive way of working that's deeply personal. It's a city that pushes you to respond, adapt and feel everything at once," he adds. "Paris offered the opposite: space, rhythm, time to pause and reflect. My work often sits in the tension between the two – driven by emotion, but refined with intention."

Rooted in minimalism, Ghanem's designs highlight simple, clean forms and natural materials that gracefully stand the test of time. His first ever design collection, Remember Love?, is made entirely of handmade, polished stainless steel. The objects are based on everyday items that hold collective memories of life in the Lebanese capital, from breezeblock bricks and plastic chairs found on balconies, to gas canisters used for heat or light; all transformed into shining metal.

"By using mirrored surfaces, they are no longer just objects to be used or observed; they become reflective, literally and emotionally," says Ghanem. "The viewer completes each piece by bringing into it their own memories and presence. It's about recognition, confrontation and reflection, in every sense of the word."

@badih\_ghanem – M.G



### SHAHA RAPHAEL

From the workshops of the Architectural Association in London to the artisanal ateliers of Beirut, Lebanese designer Shaha Raphael is building on the region's long tradition of making. "We make objects because it's an instinctual act: to process the world around us and reflect it back to itself. It is the tools that unlock new languages of making," she says. "Our culture has always been recorded in material artefacts that stand as markers of civilization, of advancement, of beauty and sensibility. By working with local materials and craftspeople, I see each piece as part of that continuum, showing the region as active and contributing to culture today."

Driven by a sense of curiosity for objects and how they are made, Raphael dives into her creative process to unearth ideas, moving fluidly between materials such as stone, clay, metal as well as digital tools, while also collaborating with local artisans. Between these variables, chance plays a role and becomes part of the work itself, which ranges from small-scale sculptures that become either wearable or utilitarian, to larger furniture pieces.

Raphael's first solo show, *Low Tide*, showcased this summer in Saint-Tropez with non-profit organization House of Today, was inspired by marine forms: shells, fossils and bones she'd collected over time. The pieces question the identity of such objects: are they found or designed? The collection was developed in Lebanon with ten artisans – from stoneworkers and metal casters to lacemakers and woodworkers – who translated her ideas into functional works: claw-like onyx side tables, a modular aluminium-and-wood coffee table, fishbone candelabras, fossil-like spoons and a chess set in copper and silver.

"I see the role of the designer as inseparable from the role of the artisan," says Raphael. "The designer proposes, but it is the artisan who gives the work its body. In our region, artisans form a cultural and social pillar, yet many are losing their livelihoods because of instability and war. Listening to them, working with them, and keeping these skills alive is not only about preserving techniques, it's also about giving both of us a place to express ourselves and find refuge in making." *shaha.xyz* – AIDAN IMANOVA



Shaha Raphael at her studio in Saghbine, Lebanon, photographed by Tarek Moukaddem. Opposite page: objects from the designer's *Low Tide* collection, inspired by marine life

Lameice Abu Aker  
photographed in  
Milan by Eleonora  
Vergnano, with  
colourful designs  
from her Eye  
Candy collection



لameice ابو اكر



## LAMEICE ABU AKER

Placing her design philosophy at the intersection of ancient craft and contemporary aesthetics, Palestinian designer Lameice Abu Aker seeks to reinvent traditional Levantine glassmaking for modern users. Based between Jerusalem and Milan, her designs – which range from decorative vases to functional glasses and teapots – are playful, candy-hued and unconventional, and are made using traditional glassblowing techniques.

Produced in collaboration with the well-known Twam family of glassblowers, who have been practicing their craft for generations in the area of Jaba', between Jerusalem and Ramallah, Abu Aker's designs are as much experiments in trial and error as they are an intentional vision. "Working with the Twam family has taught me that tradition comes alive with risk. We bent glass and did things 'the wrong way', discovering a whimsical new dialect within our heritage," Abu Aker says. "Today, I hold the balance between craft and irreverence, treating glass not as a relic but as an accomplice, one that comes from a lineage of history, but is ever-present.

"Glass is not a material so much as a temperament: seductive, impatient and unforgiving. It demands negotiation," the designer continues. "My vision is to keep its unruliness intact while introducing gestures of colour, humour and form, so that each piece is born between antiquity and a wink of the unexpected."

Abu Aker's Eye Candy collection of drinking vessels and pitchers is all organic curves and divots with contrasting hues, while her Dreamlike series is a bold, curvaceous collection full of bubble-like forms, pushing the boundaries of what can be achieved with glassblowing. The Teta Edit collection is full of retro-nostalgia: inspired by her grandmother's garden and treasured keepsakes, the collection focuses on translating precious memories into glass. "I wanted them to feel alive, and simultaneously tender and functional; ready to enter daily life," says the designer. "My work aims to live in that balance: playful enough to provoke and responsible enough to endure and pass on an honourable craft." [ornamentalbylameice.com](http://ornamentalbylameice.com) – M.G

# يوسف الهادي



Youssef El Hadi outside his home in Beirut, with a vase from his Hymne à Beyrouth collection. Photographed by Tarek Moukaddem

Chafic Mekawi at the MODU Method HQ garden in Dubai, with a print of his Zellige Monobloc chair. Photographed by Studio Limbo



# شفيق مكاوي

# ماجد البستكي

Majid Al Bastaki sits on the Palm Repose bench at his home in Sharjah. Photographed by Studio Limbo

YOUSSEF EL HADI

يوسف الهادي

Lebanese designer Youssef El Hadi, founder of Y.E.H. Studios, is inspired by both the bustling urban chaos of Beirut and the natural tranquillity of the mountains in rural Bzebdine: his ethos sits at the crux of this juxtaposition. El Hadi pursues beauty in unexpected places while still valuing the simplicity and tradition of working with natural materials like wood and stone. In 2020, he co-founded a small home renovation company, which aided his understanding of how design interacts with daily life. Two years later, he officially established Y.E.H. Studios, uniting architecture, interiors and furniture design all under one roof.

"Furniture and objects have given me an intimate canvas where I can explore emotion, storytelling and craft up close," he explains. "I work with materials like wood, brass, and stone not just for their beauty, but because they change and develop character over time, just like the cities and homes they inhabit." The designer's latest collection, Hymne à Beyrouth, was launched during Milan Design Week 2025, and captures Beirut's multilayered, often contradictory character through a fusion of Modernist architecture and nostalgic elements often found in Lebanese homes. "Materiality was central," El Hadi says. "We chose rich woods, warm brass and marble for their ability to age and record life across their surfaces; their veins, imperfections, and patina becoming proof of lived history." The result? Objects imbued with old-world charm, while simultaneously remaining effortlessly timeless. @yehstudios - M.G

CHAFIC MEKAWI

شفيق مكادي

Canadian-Lebanese architect and designer Chafic Mekawi sees design as both a form of storytelling and a way to solve everyday problems, creating something meaningful and functional at a single stroke.

Growing up between Beirut, London and Dubai (where he is now based), Mekawi's multidisciplinary approach is also informed by how different cultures and places combine as sources of inspiration. With his background in both architecture and art, this dual lens allows him to use design "as a bridge between function and storytelling, as a way to make the complex tangible and to shape experiences that resonate beyond the visual," he says. "Today, my focus lies in the liminal space between the digital and the physical, exploring how design processes and technology can move beyond function to become a form of storytelling that resonates emotionally and culturally."

Many of Mekawi's pieces are rooted in narrative and context, and explore how local vernaculars can be reimagined for a global audience. This ethos has guided his explorations of Persian carpets, looking at how pattern and colour encode cultural memory across generations, and the Zellige Monobloc chair, which reimagines a global object through the lens of regional craft.

The Nasab bookcase seeks to reimagine this piece of furniture beyond its function, but as an active part of an interior space. "Books are often bought for decoration, so the bookcase itself has become passive, a backdrop rather than an active statement," he says. "I looked at how a bookcase could evolve with its owner while also honouring local heritage." [chaficmekawi.com](http://chaficmekawi.com) - M.G

ماجد البستكي

MAJID AL BASTAKI

Emirati architect and product designer Majid Al Bastaki moves fluidly between disciplines, but at the centre of it all is his penchant for storytelling, which reflects the cultural layers of the UAE while opening them up to new interpretations. "Growing up in Sharjah, surrounded by mosques, souks and cultural landmarks, the city itself became my classroom," he says. "I realised that design was not just about structures or objects, but about creating experiences that connect people with culture."

This philosophy has defined both Al Bastaki's career and the vision behind MAB Studio, the multidisciplinary practice he founded to "bridge architecture, product design and photography". Trained as an architect yet shaped equally by his passion for image-making, he approaches design with precision and narrative intent.

His Al Bawaba series is an ongoing collection of furniture inspired by the steel doors that once adorned Emirati homes in the 1980s. The debut piece, Bo Naj-Ma, with its fluorescent hues and patterned façade, was showcased last year at Dubai Design Week as part of Tashkeel's Tanween Design Programme, and later at Maison & Objet in Paris, bringing Emirati domestic nostalgia to an international stage. Its successor, Bo Nakh-La, translates the palm tree and the traditional coffee pot - symbols of generosity and hospitality - into a contemporary coffee table crafted in wood and steel.

"I want to leave behind a body of work which shows that our identity is not static, but evolving and dynamic," says the designer. "For me, design is both a storyteller and a problem solver, rooted in authenticity but always looking forward." Up next is the expansion of MAB Studio into a fully fledged design house, a new coffee-table book on architectural heritage, and more designs that honour tradition while embracing the future. [majidalbastaki.com](http://majidalbastaki.com) - MONA BASHARAT