

COMMERCIAL

# Interior design

The essential guide for Middle East interior design professionals

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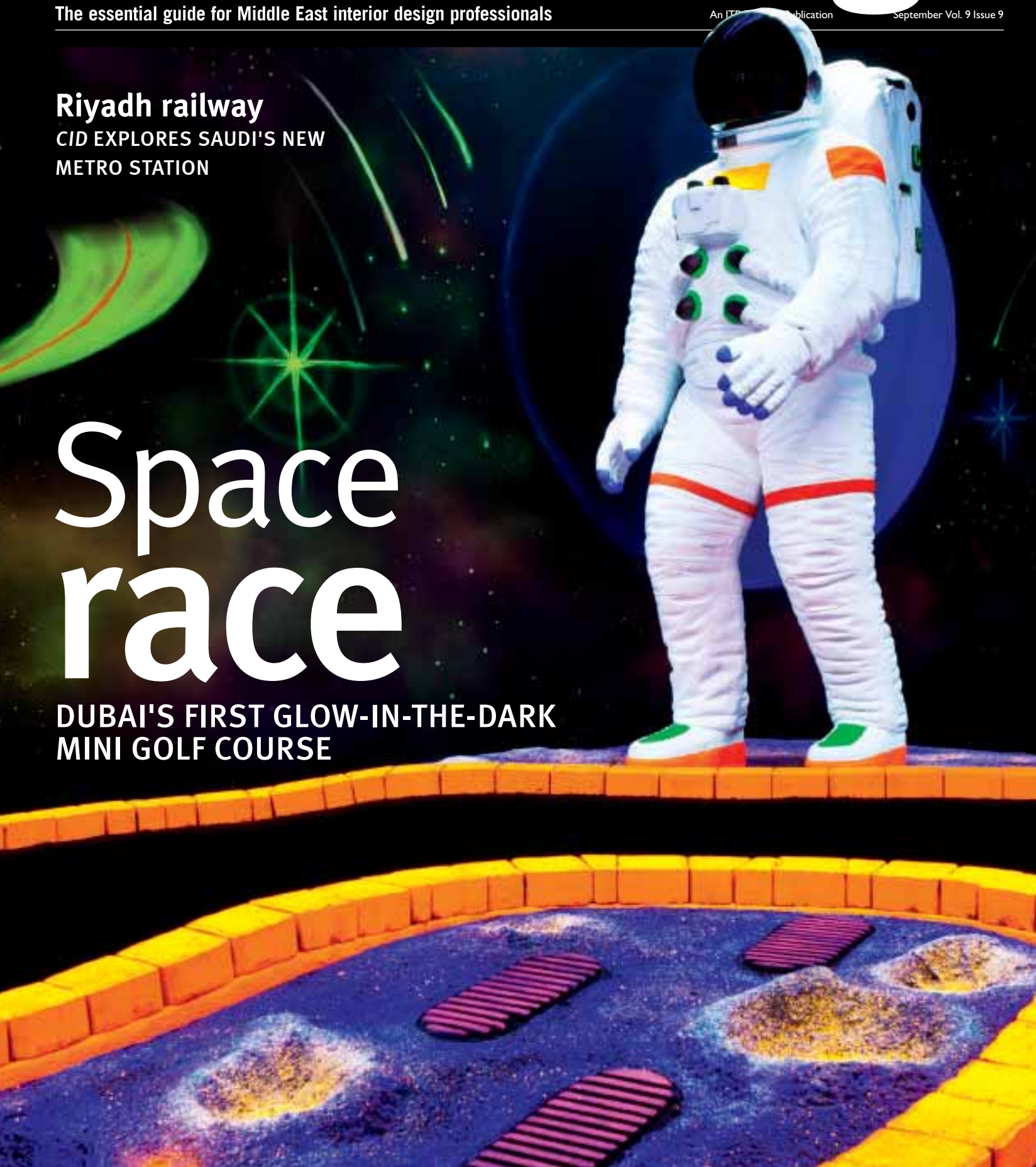
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MINI GOLF COURSE





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# Street smart

## HOW CAN INTERIOR AND FURNITURE DESIGNERS INFLUENCE THE RISE OF URBAN FURNITURE IN DUBAI?

Dubai is often labeled the “design hub” of the Middle East with its growing number of cultural projects and events. Yet street culture has always been the missing puzzle of its urban fabric, an essential tool for establishing a solid cultural identity.

And one of the main components of creating a solid street life is incorporating the right kind of street furniture. Today, street furniture has taken on a new identity as it shifts from regular wooden benches to interesting designs, quirky aesthetics and interactive features. This trend can be observed from the walkways of Paris, Amsterdam and the United States. Still, Dubai seems to be the one lagging behind. CID asks experts, how does this affect Dubai as a growing design hub? And, perhaps more importantly, what can local designers do to change this?

“Every city’s identity has always been a dialogue between public and private spaces,” said Italian designer and architect, Antonio Pio Saracino, who showcased a number of creations at Design Days Dubai 2013.

“Public spaces have always been a cardinal part in the definition of the energy of a city,” he explained. “Street furniture plays an important role in engaging people to live the city through its public spaces...It is very important for the advancement of a contemporary city like Dubai.”

Saracino added that creating street furniture would add to a contemporary lifestyle and en-

gage the city with its people in a far more meaningful manner. “[It] all contributes to creating the true culture of the city.”

Hamad Khoory, architect and partner at LOCI architecture + design, a local firm that won the majlis design competition at INDEX 2013, agreed that in addition to lacking street furniture, Dubai lacks street life in general.

“The city has been designed around the mobility of the car rather than the walkability of the city dweller. This allows segregated pockets of street life to take place at certain nodes within the city. These nodes are separated by over-scaled towers and wide motorways that alienate the streetscape and the passerby,” he said.

Comparing contemporary Dubai to old Dubai, Khoory explained: “In the old days of Dubai, the souks, sikkas and meydans of bastikiya used to be the outdoor majlis for the people. A family would usually provide the street a series of long benches with a water fountain shaded by a natural Arees structure or a palm tree.” He concluded that a lack of such structures and encouragement of social bonding results in a weaker “communal mesh.”

According to Khoory, Dubai is currently on two sides of the spectrum. One side is proving itself an emerging design centre, “acting as a mixing pot for artists and designers,” while the other side lacks an artistic street identity, and “poses a character crisis to a city trying to cement itself as a regional design hub.”

There is, however, no doubt that the city is indeed moving forward, boasting its array of cultural events that promote art and design.

“It is a natural progression that street design will follow, which you can already see happening in Downtown Dubai, the home of the

ers should definitely start focusing on developing urban furniture since its popularity among many designers around the world.

“Some of the most successful manufacturers of furniture in Australia make for the public space,” he said. “Urban Art Project is one of such companies. They

sis to refresh people in extreme heat as well as urban design that sources energy as photovoltaic solar power.

Moreover, Khoory noted that designers in Dubai shouldn’t merely follow the trend of creating funky street designs, but rather make ones that have an

sense of identity it brings forth,” he explained.

“As a city develops its street furniture and cityscape, a certain identity should grow along with it. Yet, that is one characteristic that Dubai is short of,” he added.

Regardless of all the support encouraging a flux of urban furniture in Dubai, progress has been slow. So, what can local designers do to encourage a change?

“[Designers] need to work with major property developers to create unique solutions. To truly engage with the region, a slow process of really learning from local knowledge is the best way to deliver a fantastic design outcome,” Weiss suggested.

In conclusion, Bielecki insisted: “By bringing courtyard spaces and streetscapes into project scope and educating our clients, [designers] have the ability to motivate change.”

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city’s design events,” said Cyril Zammit, fair director, Design Days Dubai.

Laura Bielecki, senior interior designer at GAJ, agreed that a growing street culture can already be seen in the Al Quoz industrial area as well; however, it is “sparse in inspiration.”

“I feel that bringing a more human level of interaction with outdoor cafes, seating, trees and walkways could encourage a greater culture of lingering participation in the local scene,” she said.

Zammit commented that there is a strong potential for a new market in Dubai and street furniture falls directly in the loop: “Designing street furniture will give local furniture designers a better command of their work as most... have concentrated their efforts on residential and corporate offices. But building up an identity and character for a city would be an exciting new challenge.”

Yet the more challenging part in making this happen, he added, is the need for “buy-ins from developers.”

Australian gallery, Broached Commissions, who also showcased at this year’s Design Days Dubai, has worked on countless public furniture projects. Lou Weiss, creative director and founder, agreed that local design-

ers have manufacturing facilities in Australia and China and service the Middle East. Governments are always looking to improve their public spaces and they are great clients. So it makes sense to pursue this market.”

Khoory further remarked that not only should local designers start focusing on designing for outdoor urban spaces, “but there needs to be a major change in attitude towards pedestrian accessibility and streetscape design from the authorities.”

“The initiative should begin from local governing authorities, followed by local artists and designers alike,” he said. Khoory did, however, state that climatic factors could be major influencing factor for street designs in the region.

All agreed that specific measures such as selecting materials that withstand heat, direct sun, dust and humidity are ideal for Dubai’s harsh climate.

“In such a hot climate, the street furniture must not only provide shade but also a mechanism to cool down,” said Weiss.

Saracino added that if he was to design street furniture in Dubai, he would definitely source inspiration from the local culture and use it in ways that are both efficient and practical, such as water vaporisers to create an oa-

identity and a purpose.

“I believe that the focus of local designers from all backgrounds should shift from designing elements that are beautiful for the sake of being beautiful to designing elements that are beautiful because of the strong

