



Roudha Alshamsi

Founding Director of Roudha Alshamsi Design

Founded in 2017, Roudha Alshamsi Design is an interior design studio specialising in experimental interior and product design. Alshamsi's distinctive artistic identity deeply influences her work, with each design being a unique artistic creation in both concept and execution.

Roudha Alshamsi is an artist and a designer whose early artistic experiences continue to shape her approach to spatial design. After graduating from Zayed University in 2011, she developed a growing interest in modern, contemporary, and futuristic art, which is evident in her later work. In recent years, she has delved into experimental space and furniture design, using artistic methods to evoke specific emotional responses and communicate well-defined design concepts.

Alshamsi collaborates closely with clients on a range of commercial projects, including studio spaces and experimental exhibition designs for high-profile events such as the F1 Grand Prix and the

Qasr Al Hosn Festival. She also focuses on limited-edition VIP artworks as well as concept furniture, lighting pendants, seating, and accessories. Roudha has worked alongside skilled artisans and partnered with renowned international brands like FBMI, Orsoni, and House of Artisans on exclusive projects.

Her work has been showcased globally at prestigious events such as the London Design Fair, Salone del Mobile Milano, Maison & Objet, Sikka, COP28, Abu Dhabi Art, and as an annual exhibitor at Downtown Design in Dubai.

Design: The expression

Roudha Alshamsi

Abstract

Design thinking is a dynamic, analytical, and creative process that engages individuals in exploring opportunities, creating, prototyping, gathering feedback, and refining models. It is shaped by cultural contexts, with designers in regions like the UAE drawing on their unique heritage and environment to reflect their identity. Emirati designers, in particular, incorporate local identity into their design thinking, enriching the process through a blend of domain-relevant skills, creativity, and intrinsic motivation. Designers in the UAE integrate both regional and global perspectives to reimagine design challenges. Abstraction plays a key role in the design process, offering a balance between what is included or omitted, evoking curiosity and emotional connection. Ultimately, successful design manifests not only through the materialisation of concepts but also through storytelling and emotional engagement, reflecting the designer's deep connection to their cultural and personal experiences.

Keywords: *Design thinking, Innovation, Abstraction, Cultural Identity, UAE designers*

Introduction

Design thinking is at the heart of every successful design process, serving as both a methodology and a mindset that guides designers through exploration, creation, prototyping, feedback, and refinement. This article explores how the design thinking process is shaped by cultural context, innovation, abstraction, and

manifestation, particularly within the UAE. By examining the distinct design approaches that emerge from this region, we uncover how Emirati designers blend global perspectives with local traditions to create innovative, emotionally engaging designs that tell meaningful stories. Through abstraction and conceptual thinking, the process transcends the mere creation of objects or spaces, becoming a form of expression that invites emotional connection and narrative, reflecting a designer's deep personal and cultural connection to their work.

Definition of Design thinking

Every design process is guided by design thinking. "Design Thinking is generally defined as an analytic and creative process that engages a person in the opportunities to expertise, create, and prototype models, gather feedback, and redesign." (Razzouk, R., & Shute, V. 2012). In another definition: "At its core, design thinking refers to how designers see and how they consequently think" Lui, Y-T (1996).

Design Thinking Process

In the design thinking process, two different design thinking directions are taken by creatives. They are either finders or makers; finders are driven by curiosity to find explanations to unknown phenomena to come to a better understanding of surroundings, whereas makers utilised their knowledge and "are driven to synthesise what they know in new construction, arrangements, patterns, compositions, and concepts." (Owen, 2017)

A design thinking process is shaped by a diagrammatic depiction of the design problem. This simple depiction is gradually built up to become more complex in the form of dialogue, critique, reflection

and interpretation of the outcomes and designer's vision, (Do & Gross, 2001; Nagai & Noguchi, 2003).

With these fundamental processes practiced in various professional fields, differences in the design process arise to lead to a more crystallised definition of the design thinking process. Taking for instance design in the MENA region and in the UAE, it is shaped by the cultural asset; it is a reflection of unique cultural traits, heritage elements and surroundings. We as design creatives from the UAE seek our own interpretation to enrich the design thinking process with elements and concepts that distinguish our work from other regional designers. Apart from that, Emirati designers are witnessing an intellectual cultural exchange amidst the accelerating design boom. Therefore, the design thinking process of this region is faced by interchanging design requirements, higher demands for cultural knowledge and more conceptualised approaches. Each designer is approaching design thinking process with a distinct approach using skills of a cognitive style.

Innovation vs invention



Artwork 1 Acacia Series, Concept Table, 2017

Invention and innovation are terms of the design thinking process. Invention is distinguished from innovation in the fact that invention is the ability to generate new ideas, while innovation is the ability of an entrepreneur to “implement and introduce ideas into a form of widespread use”. In another definition, innovation is “simply the doing of new things or the doing of things that are already being done in a new way” (J Schumpeter 1989). Schumpeter also highlighted that innovation is of a greater contribution to prosperity than invention.

The ability to innovate requires a componential framework. “The psychologist Teresa Amabile proposes “three main psychological components: domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant skills, and task motivation.” (Wylant, B.2008). Domain-relevant skills refer to factual skills attained by an individual. Task-relevant skills are the intrinsic motivations a creative pursues and comes from within an individual’s view. With creativity-relevant skills, a designer’s cognitive style influences the problem solving approaches to specific design problem; it reflects the way a design thinker perceives, comprehends and visualises a design task. Ultimately, a certain degree of novelty is captured in the design thinking process and outcomes.

Design innovation in the UAE is shaped by the ability to interpret local identity into a componential frameworks. With constantly seeking research for new concepts and knowledge using advanced domain-relevant skills, Emirati design creatives are equivalently using their creativity-relevant skills to look into design problems and come up with new interpretations and reintroduce findings in a fashionable manner in various design fields such as architecture, interiors, fashion or Arts. The use of unique regional domain,

creativity, and task skills presents a unique framework for designers in the MENA region and the UAE specifically. The intrinsic motivation of designers is triggered whilst staying original to their own identity as Emirati designers. They possess a competitive advantage by having the ability to express original concepts through design.

Abstraction



Artwork 2 Zor, Concept Vase, 2020

Artists very well acknowledge abstraction. In a way, abstraction is a pause in time of an artwork or a moment to be captured that will never come back. Look at a painter for instance, painting a scene starts with the movement of brush strokes onto a canvas. Those brush strokes highlight elements of a scene or an object. It is only the painter who decides how far those brush strokes will go to best depict the beauty they see or a feeling they express.

We as humans tend to be attracted to the unknown, the unclear and indefinite. When abstraction is applied in design, it is the fine balance between what to be taken away and what to be kept or added; a state to be reached that is a fine line between completion and incompleteness. Abstraction is an intuitive expression. It triggers

a sense of curiosity and excitement in the design thinking process for both creatives and the byproduct of design. Designers specifically, use abstraction in their design concepts, design process or design product to provoke the reintroduction of abstracted forms.

Manifestation

The embodiment of a concept is the true essence of a successful design. A product or a space has more value when it tells a story, or has a conceptual approach. Designers, like “makers” tend to seek not only elements from their surrounding, but also, they seek experiences and moments to carry forward a feeling and convey a story. It is an invitation to experience and be emotionally attached to the design process.



Artwork 3 NSJ, Kilim Carpets 2023

Today, the power of storytelling in design is quite significant; as an Emirati designer, I seek to narrate stories from the Emirates to the world. As a form of expression, I tend to look thoroughly into my surroundings like nature's flora and fauna, heritage and handcrafts of artisans. I am more curious to be involved in the making of architectural elements, objects and feelings I grew up with. With a solid foundation and research, moments become the intrinsic motivation resulting in perpetual and timeless artworks.

Conclusion

In the UAE's rapidly growing design scene, designers find themselves in a unique position where intellectual, cultural, and emotional exchanges are constantly reshaping the landscape. Through this continuous exchange, design thinking in the UAE has evolved to reflect a balance between originality, identity, and conceptual depth. Emirati designers have an intrinsic advantage: the ability to draw on their rich heritage while remaining open to new ideas, thus creating works that are not only innovative but also deeply rooted in the cultural and emotional experiences of their surroundings.

Ultimately, design is an asset, a manifestation of the mind and spirit, and a powerful form of expression. By embracing both the abstract and the tangible, the personal and the universal, designers in the UAE are shaping a future where design transcends functionality, becoming a medium for storytelling, connection, and cultural dialogue. Much like the brush strokes of that painter; a designer orchestrates design skills, sometimes choreographed and other times chaotic to tell and express!

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