

SPECIAL LIVING

Beirut Design Fair | September 2017



A unique and creative design scene, an exciting, entrepreneurial spirit, a cosmopolitan crossroads, and a culture of exceptional crasmanship: these qualities and others will be on display to the world during the first edition of BEIRUT DESIGN FAIR, set to take place in the Lebanese capital in September 2017.

It will take place at the same time, from 20 to 24 September 2017, and in the same location, the Beirut International Exhibition & Leisure Center, as BEIRUT ART FAIR (23,000 visitors), a contemporary art fair which since 2010 has sought to promote the artistic and cultural eervescence of Beirut, Lebanon and the countries of the MENA region (Middle East, North Africa).

Waiting for the event starts we meet Bénédicte Colpin, special advisor for the Beirut Design Fair for an interview.

Today, Beirut is described as an outstanding «incubator» for a variety of artistic elds. In your opinion, what place does design occupy in this landscape, and what makes Beirut unique among other cities and places in the world?

Beirut has always occupied a special place, thanks to its geographical position, its history, its way of interacting with the rest of the world. These factors make it a truly exceptional spot, both in reality and in the collective imagination. It's a city in perpetual reconstruction, and this type of urgency always inspires creativity. Creators are inevitably in uenced by this immense cultural richness, along with Beirut's particular form of cosmopolitanism. There exists in Beirut a way of understanding the world that isn't simply a façade or a function of modern hyper-connectedness: it's something that is truly lived. Most creators in Beirut have studied abroad or in highly regarded local design schools (Alba, Usek or Lau), and while they're focused on Lebanon, they radiate internationally. It's an ultra-connected, highly cultured scene that's proud of its freedom.

There is a signicant, global Lebanese diaspora that is a driving force behind Beirut's creativity. In terms of design, who are the major gures in France, Europe and the rest of the world ?

This is another aspect of Beirut that makes it such a unique place. In addition to a local scene with undeniable in uence, the city also bene ts from a diaspora spread throughout the world: people who are at once integrated into their adopted cultures while remaining attached to their country of origin, in one way or another. Whether these creators are based in Lebanon or elsewhere, Beirut remains the anchor. And this is true for all the celebrities in the industry, be it Chahan Minassian, Aline d'Amman Asmar, Karim Habib, Karen Chekerdjian, david/nicholas, Nada Debs, Marc Baroud, Charles Kalpakian, Bernard Khoury or Rabi Kayrouz - to mention only the best- known. In terms of style, this by no means implies that Middle- Eastern archetypes are omnipresent. Quite the contrary : Lebanon is, by de nition, a place of con uence between West and East. No, there exist a variety of styles. On the other hand, what unites all creators in Beirut is their permanent search for authenticity, freedom, quality and singularity. From Paris to New York, from London to São Paulo, the great designers, interior architects, and architects distill this unique culture and lifestyle

For decades, Beirut and Lebanon have o ered a unique network of cra smanship. Many designers have come to the country to produce objects and projects. Could you outline the general history of this phenomenon?

Unlike other countries in the Middle East, Beirut has very active artisans in the elds of metalworking, ceramics, glass, wood, etc. The presence of these artisans and cra smen stems directly from the demand for their skills. The Lebanese value quality, buyers are present, that the city is in perpetual construction and reconstruction - all of these factors keep this culture of cra smanship alive. Artisans work in the same way as creators. They excel in their art and gather other skills from neighboring countries to complement their expertise. This attitude of openness, exibility and community is one of the city's strong points, and the close dialogue that exists between artisans and designers enhances the quality of the local scene. For several days and in a single location, BEIRUT DESIGN FAIR will serve as a catalyst for these creative energies, while showcasing the richness Beirut's design scene - both locally and internationally based. It will allow design lovers from Beirut and elsewhere to acquire exceptional pieces that testify to the quality of contemporary design in the city and region. In addition, the fact that BEIRUT DESIGN FAIR will take place at the same time as BEIRUT ART FAIR enhances the event and heightens the excitement for its debut edition in September 2017.

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