

Interiors | The design scene

in Lebanon is becoming more self-reliant in training and craftsmanship.

By Dominic Lutyens

Lebanon's designers have long faced adversity. They receive no government funding, there have been few platforms to showcase contemporary design, and the Lebanese population has shown little interest in it. One resource for designers has been the country's strong crafts tradition, particularly in Tripoli, where handcrafted copper is a speciality. These skills were once passed from parents to offspring but, with a decline in local demand for traditional crafts, they are in danger of disappearing. It doesn't help that many Lebanese designers work alongside Italian artisans who are more efficient, although more costly.

Joy Mardini, who has a design gallery in Gemmayzeh, a hip neighbourhood in Beirut, identifies some of the common obstacles: "Lebanon has been known for years for its crafts, but applying these to detailed design pieces has been challenging in terms of production pricing. Another difficulty they face is making a name for themselves as the number of designers on the market is increasing."

Beirut's Académie Libanaise Des Beaux-Arts (ALBA) recently introduced a product-design course; before that, many Lebanese designers studied abroad. "Previously you could only study product design in the last year of ALBA's interior design course," says Lebanese designer Thomas Trad, who studied at Central Saint Martins, then worked for London-based Fredrikson Stallard and Michael Anastassiades before setting up a Beirut studio in 2016. Even so, Beirut is gaining international recognition as a centre of cutting-edge design. Trad showed his M table made of green, black and white marble in an exhibition presented by Danish digital design store Adorno during Beirut Design Week last June. Now in its seventh year, BDW is organised by Beirut-



Above: Adorno Beirut collection, including 'Lizard King' chair by cocoexotico, €6,000; 'Unborn Creatures of Light' circular light by Youmna Geday, €4,500; 'Crystal Table' in brown and copper finish by Rita Kettaneh, €399; 'Core 3' table lamps by Christian Zahr, €1,800, [adorno.design](#)

Sameer Noun



▲ 'Moon and Feathers' cushion by Kissweh, \$350, [kissweh.com](#)



▲ Low marble table by Thomas Trad, €8,000, [adorno.design](#)

based non-profit organisation MENA Design Research Center.

This year's show was held at Beit Beirut, a cultural centre also known as the Barakat building. A former apartment block built in the 1920s, it straddled the Green Line separating Christians from Muslims during the civil war of 1975–1990. Beirut's municipality shows little interest in preserving old buildings, and it took heritage activists, in particular architect Mona El Hallak, to rescue it. Retaining traces of wartime damage, including bullet-pocked walls, its restoration was led by Lebanese architect Youssef Haidar in 2009.

"Beirut's design scene is young but evolving," says Mardini. "There is also the Beirut Design



◀ 'Totem' side tables by Karen Chekerdjian, €2,400, [dilmos.it](#)



▶ 'Stratagems' table in Perlino Rosato Marble with Orange resin by Carla Baz, from \$2,200, [jmdesigngallery.com](#)

Fair, which takes place in September, and House of Today's Design Biennale." The latter, held this year from December 12 to 28, will showcase work by 22 designers, including David/Nicolas, whose new Supernova collection was recently shown at Carpenters Workshop Gallery in Paris. Founded by Beirut-based entrepreneur Cherine Magrabi Tayeb in 2012, House of Today is a non-profit organisation; in 2015 it launched a scholarship for product design students to study at "a highly rated product design university in Lebanon or abroad". "Students must deal with high

[struttandparker.com](#)

Burnsall Street, SW3
£2,950,000

Freehold



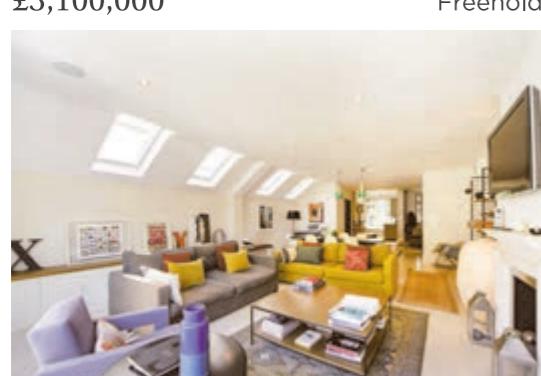
A stylishly modernised wide, double-fronted, three-bedroom period house.

1,733 sq ft (161 sq m)
Two reception rooms | Three bedrooms | Three bathrooms | Excellent decoration | Terraced townhouse | EPC rating D

Chelsea 020 3813 9261
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Chipstead Street, SW6
£3,100,000

Freehold



An outstanding and beautifully presented six-bedroom 'Lion house'.

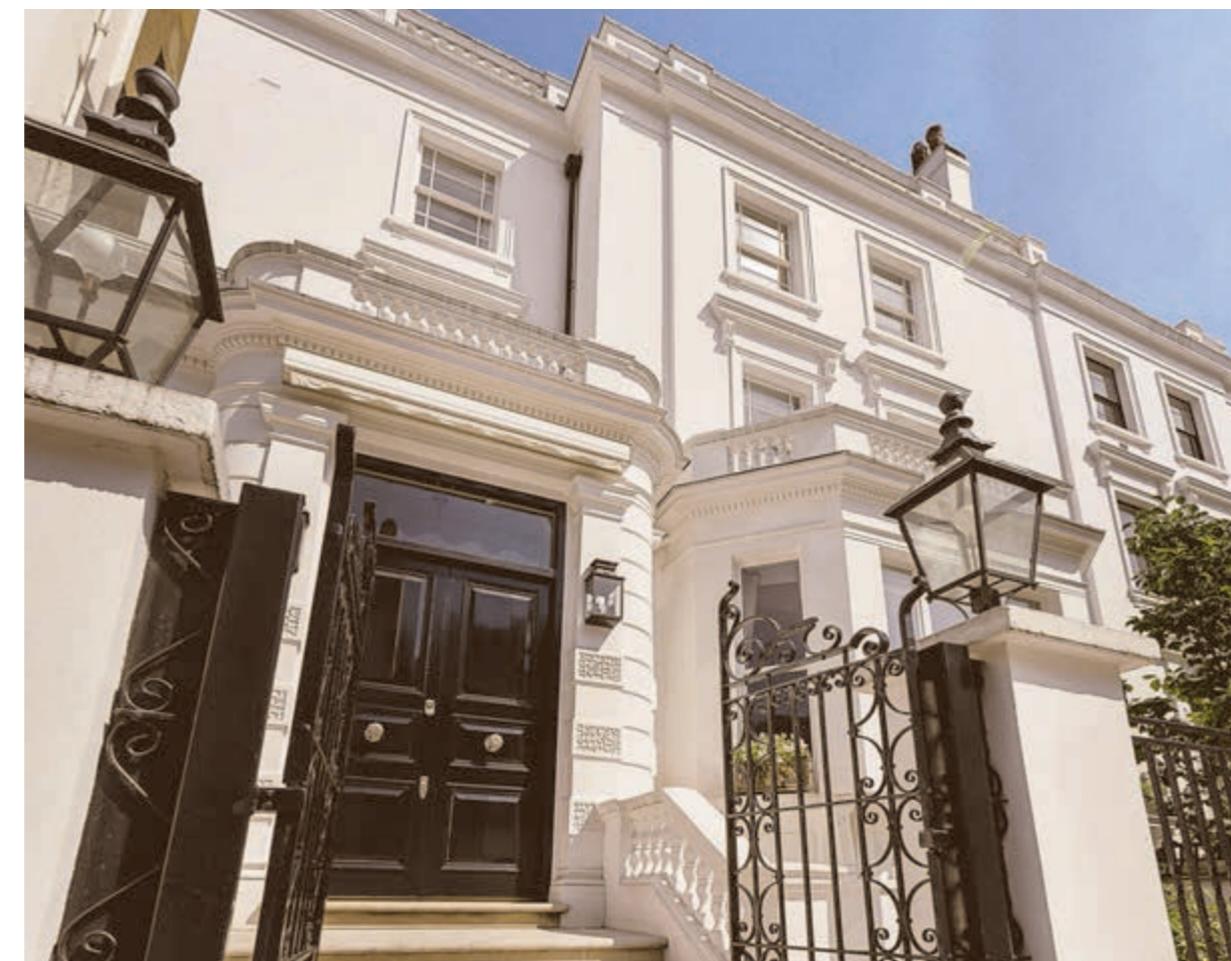
2,943 sq ft (273.4 sq m)
Reception room | Kitchen | Dining room | Office/media room | Four bedrooms with en suite bathrooms | Further bedroom | Shower room | Utility room | Cloakroom | Garden | EPC rating D

Fulham 020 3813 9162
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Hyde Park Gate, SW7

Price on Application

Freehold



An exceptional family house and adjoining mews house, recently refurbished with grand entertaining space.

7,502 sq ft (697 sq m)
Entrance hall | Drawing room | Dining room | Kitchen/breakfast room with conservatory | Home cinema/TV room | Eight bedrooms | Passenger lift | Large private garden | Separate mews with a double garage | EPC rating E

Please contact James Forbes for further details
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Halsey Street, SW3
£3,950,000

Freehold



An attractive Grade II Listed four-bedroom freehold family house.

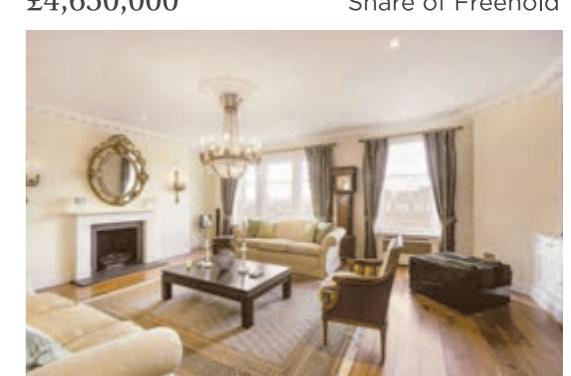
2,049 sq ft (190.4 sq m)
Four bedrooms | Two reception rooms | Three bathrooms | Conservatory | Kitchen | Terraced | Townhouse | Garden | Roof terrace | EPC rating exempt

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Campden Hill Court, W8

£4,650,000

Share of Freehold



An impressive three-bedroom apartment on the top floor (with lift) of this portered mansion block.

2,471 sq ft (229.6 sq m)
Entrance hall | Drawing room | Dining room | Kitchen | Master bedroom with en suite bathroom | Two further bedrooms | Shower room | Utility room | Porter | Lift | EPC rating F

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costs, weak networks and lack of professional guidance, making it an unfavourable career choice," says Magrabi Tayeb. Compounding the hardships faced by designers is Beirut's deteriorating environment: the municipality is cavalier about its green spaces, which are gradually being stripped away. But academics and creatives are rebelling against neglect of communal resources. This year BDW invited designers, activists, writers and students to consider how design could transform city life. "This year saw a distinctive growth in participation of local public and private institutions," says Doreen Toutikian, BDW's founding director. "The main exhibitions in Beit Beirut welcomed more than 10,000 visitors."



▲ 'Stratagems' light
by Carla Baz,
\$3,100-\$4,300,
[jmdesigngallery.com](#)

▼ 'Tatami' box
by Nada Debs,
\$1,700,
[nadadebs.com](#)



▲ 'Trapeze' chairs by Nayef Francis,
\$1,750, [houseoftoday.com](#)



▲ 'Mickey' armchair
by Beirut-based
studio Bokja,
[bokja.com](#)



▲ 'Showdown' table by Michèle and Georges Maria, \$30,000, [houseoftoday.com](#)



▲ 'Please Don't Tell Mom' mirrors by Marc Dibeh, \$3,400-\$4,500, [jmdesigngallery.com](#)

believe in local craftsmanship." Meanwhile, the French cane used in Trad's screens, stocked by Joy Mardini Design Gallery, is locally made. Nayef Francis's "Weave" pendant lamps have a similar aesthetic. French-Lebanese, Dubai-based designer Carla Baz also champions Lebanese crafts; her collection, "Stratagems", which includes marble tables filled with pools of colourful resin, and marble and brass lamps, is also sold by Mardini. At the Adorno show, Youmna Geday exhibited "Unborn Creatures of Light", an idiosyncratic lamp ringed by hollowed-out, illuminated eggshells.

At BDW, designs from other countries also tapped into regional craftsmanship. In the ABC Verdun shopping mall, a pop-up exhibition displayed Kissweh's cushions inspired by Palestinian needlework, and Casablanca-based Soukaina Hachem showed a shaggy wall-hanging created using traditional Moroccan weaving technique.

Yet some Middle Eastern designers who took part in BDW are reluctant to identify with the countries they hail from. Bethlehem-based brothers Elias and Yousef Anatas, co-founders of Local Industries, say: "We define ourselves as designers not as Palestinians." They describe their brilliantly colourful steel furniture as "anti-Orientalist" and "anti-folkloric". Even

'Our nation's artisans, once threatened by foreign competition, are upping their game'

Today, those numbers have reversed."

Nada Debs is an established Beirut-based designer who relishes local crafts: "There's been a recent boom in workshops opening here in response to a renewed interest in crafts," she says. "My new collection Funquetry revives marquetry used on backgammon boards. I also use mother-of-pearl, leather and tin inlay, wood perforation and straw-weaving. I mostly make use of local craftsmanship apart from my carpets made in Afghanistan." Yet, she adds, digital technology, including computer-controlled machinery and 3D-printing, is also helping to boost the fortunes of Lebanon's designers.

Another high-profile designer, Karen Chekerdjian, who produced the colourful "Totem" table, says: "I strongly

so, the duo's mission is to give new life to dying local industries, and their chairs are made in a steel-furniture factory in Bethlehem.

Yet, according to Mardini, "Lebanese design doesn't bear the stamp of 'Arabism'. It differentiates itself from design from the rest of the Arab world by not including motifs such as *moucharabieh*, the carved wooden latticework typically seen on windows."

Perhaps this is a result of the rich cultural diversity found in Lebanon. "The country has been occupied by over 18 civilisations from the Canaanites to the French Mandate," says Nayef Francis. "Eventually this mix became part of our roots, creating a unique talent whose essence is regional but whose language is universal."

STRUTT&PARKER

Drayton Gardens, SW10

£4,950,000

Freehold



An elegant and grand Grade II Listed Freehold five-bedroom house.

3,146 sq ft (292.38 sq m)
Drawing room | Family room | Master bedroom suite | Four further bedrooms | Two shower rooms | Study | Utility room | Workshop/storage | Cloakroom | Kitchen | Two vaults | Garden | EPC rating E

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Clarendon Road, W11

£18,750,000

Freehold



Cheyne Place, SW3

£6,250,000

Leasehold



An exceptional lateral three-bedroom newly refurbished penthouse with direct lift access.

2,618 sq ft (243.2 sq m)
Double height drawing room | Dining room | Sitting room | Kitchen/breakfast room | Three bedrooms | Two bathrooms | Cloakroom | 31'5 x 19'10 roof terrace | Magnificent views | Long lease | EPC rating D

Chelsea 020 3813 9261
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A sensational six-bedroom family house with off street parking and a beautiful west facing garden.

5,750 sq ft (534 sq m)
Entrance hall | Kitchen/family room | Four reception rooms | Six bedrooms | Six bathrooms | Two cloakrooms | Laundry | Pantry | Terrace | Garden | Off street parking | EPC rating C

Please contact Miles Meacock for further details
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Netherton Grove, SW10

£6,500,000

Freehold



A truly exceptional five-bedroom house with off-street parking for two cars.

3,185 sq ft (295.89 sq m)
Master bedroom with en suite bathroom and dressing room | Four further bedrooms (one en suite bathroom) | Three further shower/bathrooms | Playroom | Study | Garden | Terrace | EPC rating D

Chelsea SW10 020 3813 9320
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Sumner Place, SW7

£8,250,000

Freehold



A very rare opportunity to acquire an elegant and spacious Grade II Listed six-bedroom family home.

3,758 sq ft (349.1 sq m)
Three reception rooms | Six bedrooms | Four bathrooms (two en suite) | Cloakroom | Study/bedroom | Separate kitchenette | Utility | Wine cellar | Loft | Garden | EPC rating exempt

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