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&Cairo: Telling the city's narrative

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Utchat stool by Rami Makram for &Cairo.

By **Heba Elkayal/Daily News Egypt** June 18, 2010, 5:04 pm
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"We grew up with wood — wood around us all the time," said Cherif Makram who, along with brother Rami, is the third generation in a family of furniture producers and designers.

The family brand is Hardwood Furniture Company, started in 1935 by their grandfather with a specialization in retro and Arab-inspired designs. Today, their new line &Cairo seeks inspiration from the physical structure of the city to create contemporary designs that reflect the physical and visual experience of being in the capital.

"We have a lot to work with," said Makram, who is mainly entrenched in the production side of the new brand. He has also started to pursue the more creative elements of the business by borrowing from the family's archives of design to redesign and modify some of his grandfather's work. This vintage line of the brand has been prolific so far in the output of designs.

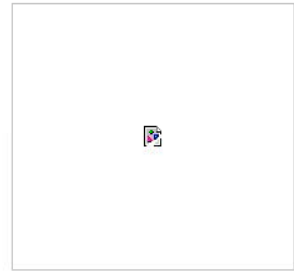
A trio of coffee tables with wide circular tabletops and long spindly legs lacquered in rose nostalgically hint at the furniture of Egyptian homes in the 1960s. Another chair inspired by their archives was redesigned to be simple in its lines and smooth curves, making it decidedly modern while still adhering to its retro heritage.

Whereas the vintage line looks both to the past and present, the line &Cairo was developed to collaborate with various designers on interpreting the experience of the city into physical form. The scaffolding around buildings being constructed learnt a console designed by Viable London a rigidity that one fails to see when looking at what appears to be a basic and delicate skeletal structure. The white table with dark wooden legs wrap around the tabletop to contrast nicely with much subtlety. Humor too is to be found in the Caretta Table by Gumdesign for &Cairo, which is based on the rather primitive design of a wheeled cart.

The Utchat stools designed by Rami were inspired by the eye of Horus. Placed in pairs they evoke a rhythm of movement as one visually traces the almond-like lines of the stool's seat. Separated, they are a fusion of soft curves and hard lines emphasized by the serrated effect of the stool's woodwork. There is nothing forthright about the stool's point of inspiration but rather a reminder of how beautifully stylized lines and silhouettes can wholly inspire the spirit of a piece.

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