

Selling the spirit of Egypt

Ahmed Kotb experiences the wonders of Egypt's first design week

Wandering through the historic Al-Muizz Street in Old Cairo is quite an experience. This week the Egyptian Ministry of Trade and Industry capitalised on the street's extraordinary features to put on show Egypt's first Design Week.

The urban design event, +20 Egypt Design, created by Italian designer Paola Navone, was hosted in and around the historical mosques, museums and houses of Old Cairo, lending an exceptional blend of cultural heritage and innovation to the event. Initiated with the aim of introducing Egyptian design to the international design map, +20 Egypt Design was an opportunity to promote Egyptian aesthetics.



[Click to view caption](#)

Ranging from furniture products and home accessories to handicrafts, historic houses were filled with both products on exhibition and visitors from Egypt and abroad. Exhibitors varied from representatives of top design companies to university students aiming to define the future of Egyptian design.

Furniture products were the main theme of the event, placed mainly in Al-Suhaymi House with a variety of beautiful designs showcasing the best of Egyptian design as well as international brands. A large portion of the exhibition was dedicated to young designers, including clothing, wood products and jewellery.

While roaming Sabil Al-Selihdar, one of the historic houses that hosted the design products of university students, an orange chez-long with an unusual shape was an eye catcher. "This chair is inspired from the shape of the Sphinx," said Sarah Moharam, 21, a young product designer.

Hammam Inal was another venue hosting young fashion designers. At the entrance a dress made up of the colours of the Egyptian flag was the first thing that met the eye. The collection also included clothes that look fashionable and yet have an Egyptian-Oriental feel to them.

For the sisters Yousra and Amal Medbouli, fashion designers, the new design initiative gave them the opportunity to get out of cyberspaces and show their designs to more people.

"We use Facebook to promote and sell our products, and we were waiting for a chance to showcase directly to a larger number of people," they pointed out. The sisters believe that there are many designers in Egypt who are not prominent but create original designs that deserve to be mass-produced. They claim that the finishing of their products is the major problem they face. "We go to special institutes that we rely on to make the finishing of our products, but most of the time the job is not done well," they said, suggesting supervision over such institutes to ensure quality.

Held from 3-7 June, +20 Egypt Design coincided with Furnex, Egypt's international furniture and home furnishings trade fair. Both events were organised and implemented through the collaboration of the Egyptian Furniture Export Council (EFEC), the Industrial Modernisation Centre (IMC), and the Egyptian Exporter Association (Expolink).

Furnex allotted a hall for young designers to showcase their products and make deals on the spot. Unlike Al-Muizz Street's +20 Egypt Design, designers at Furnex were able to sell the products exhibited.

A young designer, Rania Hilal, specialising in jewellery design, was happy to be at Furnex. "Furnex attracts many foreigners who come to buy and make export deals," Hilal said, adding that she sold many of her jewellery pieces to foreign visitors who showed interest in making large export deals. Like many other young designers, Hilal says that there should be supervised institutions to support designers in quality finishing.

Omneya El-Maghrabi, executive director of EFEC believes that Egyptian design will become more competitive in the international market. "Our design is characterised by originality, quality and reasonable pricing," she told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. El-Maghrabi further underlined the importance of encouraging young designers, since they are the future of Egyptian design. "Design workshops were organised to help Egyptian designers develop ideas inspired by Egyptian culture," El-Maghrabi said.

El-Maghrabi said that EFEC launched its first design industry workshop in 2008. The workshop was organised by Rhimal, a leading design management company, and Istituto Europeo di Design-Centro Ricerche (CRIED). Products of the workshop were showcased during the design week in Moheb Hall on Al-Muizz Street.

Rhimal's board chairman, Amr Abdel-Qawi, says it is time to establish ties between the design field and industry. "For over six decades, design has been ignored and marginalised, and manufacturers were dependant on copying designs from magazines," says Abdel-Qawi. "Fierce competition in the international design market is a driving force in encouraging originality," he added.

In order to gain the trust of the international market, Egyptian design products should have a distinct Egyptian identity, Abdel-Qawi believes.

[Front Page](#)
[Egypt](#)
[Region](#)
[Economy](#)
[International](#)
[Opinion](#)
[Press review](#)
[Culture](#)
[Features](#)
[Sports](#)
[Cartoons](#)
[People](#)
[Listings](#)
[BOOKS](#)
[TRAVEL](#)
[Site map](#)