



A classic reborn

DUBAI'S NEW CULTURAL LIBRARY IS A REFINED SETTING FOR VINTAGE FURNISHINGS BY ALVAR AALTO

UAE: Celebrating its recent opening after reconstruction, Dubai's sleek cultural library in the heart of Safa Park, The Archive, is a fitting home for a collection of classic Alvar Aalto chairs hailing from the Aalto University premises in Helsinki.

A warm patina on the chairs provides a fitting contrast to the contemporary interior of The Archive, originally constructed in 1975. From one library to another, half a world away, the chairs continue to provide a foundation for interaction and learning.

Finnish architect, designer and co-founder of Artek, Alvar Aalto originally designed Chair 69 in 1935 for the Viipuri Municipal Library in Finland. Meticulous about the interiors of his architectural creations, Aalto often designed furnishings for particular projects.

Chair 69 is considered to be one of Aalto's most convincing designs. Experimentation with bending laminate and plywood led

to the creation of its L-shaped leg, allowing the leg to attach directly to the seat.

Aalto's designs, although international in spirit, also have overtones of Finnish national identity, evident in his preference for wood.

Wood for him was a "form-inspiring, profoundly human material" and believed there is a positive effect when our skin comes into contact with natural materials. Honest and organic, his designs reflected his interpretation of functionalism and desire to "humanise architecture."

Seeking an approach to simplify everyday life, Alvar, his wife Aino, arts promoter Maire Gullichsen and art historian Nils-Gustav Hahl formed the company Artek in 1935.

"Art" and "technology" comprise the root of Artek's name and manifest. From its inception, Artek's business idea was "to sell furniture and to promote a modern



culture of habitation by exhibitions and other educational means".

Believing in a grand synthesis of the arts, architecture, urban planning and design, the four idealists strived to think differently. They advocated a new way of living and thinking, honouring authenticity, beauty and form.

Aesthetics, ethics and ecology have been the cornerstones of Artek's design strategy since the founding of the company. These pillars continue to live on.

Artek STUDIO is the creative hub where new products are developed and new materials and sustainability practices researched. In response to a slump in the company's awareness within the design industry, Artek collaborated in 2007 with Japa-

nese architect Shigeru Ban. Ban and Artek created an exhibition pavilion for the annual furniture fair in Milan, the Salone Internazionale de Mobil. Utilising a new recyclable wood/plastic composite called UPM ProFi, the pavilion provided a platform for Artek to showcase its new and classic furniture pieces

Two years later, Artek partnered with artist Tobias Rehnberger to create a cafeteria at the 2009 Venice Biennale. With its wildly colorful, geometrically complex interior, Rehnberger referenced a past painting style used on ships during World War 1, called "dazzle painting." Not only did Rehnberger win the Golden Lion award that year as best artist for what the jury said "taking us beyond the




white cube, where past modes of exhibition are reinvented and the work of art turns into a cafeteria... In this shift social communication becomes aesthetic practice," but Artek once again resonated on the minds of designers.

"Nothing old is ever reborn but neither does it totally disappear. And that which has once been born, will always reappear in a new form," said Aalto in 1921.

Stemming from the excitement created by showing its classic pieces in Milan and an increasing cultural awareness of consumption, Artek introduced 2nd Cycle collection in 2007.

For the past five years, Artek has been collecting old products from public institutions, schools, and even flea markets and then

finding new markets for them. Available for purchase at the Artek 2nd Cycle store in Helsinki and its on-line store are venerable pieces by classic designers, such as Ilmari Tapiovaara, Arne Jacobsen, Charles and Ray Eames, and Yrjo Kukkapuro, as well as Aalto. Whether a consumer buys a used or new piece, it is inevitably tied to the 2nd Cycle collection.

Artek asserts 2nd Cycle "gives these products a new context and a new lease on life, demonstrating that these pieces have new stories to tell and their usability is far from over." From Finland to Dubai, snow to sand, Artek's Chair 69 at The Archive in Safa Park will indeed have new adventures to unfold, cultures to share, and a new life in a new city. 

Continental chic

PARISIAN DUO CREATE A TASTEFULLY DESIGNED CONCEPT STORE IN A COSY JUMEIRAH VILLA

UAE: “It’s really just one unique concept: it’s not a jewelry store, it’s not a decoration store, we are really trying to mix everything that we like,” said Emmanuelle Sawko, propped on the dotted sofa with her friend and co-partner, Alexandra de Moutaudoin.

The Parisian ladies are the heart and soul behind the new bohemian chic concept store called Comptoir 102, a mix of retail, coffee shop and spirit.

“When you come here you don’t

feel like you are shopping or that you’re in a retail space; you feel like you are at home and that is why people feel so comfortable here,” Sawko said.

Rightly so, the space truly evokes a homey feel, each corner noticeably born with taste and the willingness to create comfort for all, decorated with jewellery, hanging hand bags, household plates, cups, irregular lighting, mirrors, birdcages and spinning butterflies.

Although every area appears to speak for itself, de Moutaudoin insisted that there was never any fragmentation in the partners’ idea for Comptoir: “It was always a whole idea. We never thought of this place as different atmospheres or sections; we really thought of it as an ensemble.”

One of their motivations for opening the store was the change in Dubai’s culture scene that is vibrantly evolving.

“We felt that the market was ready for a style that was a bit different and this was really our bid, to say, ‘OK, now let’s fill this gap that people are looking for here’. And all our customers and people that pass by say, ‘finally, Dubai has a place like this’. And that is exactly what we wanted to do,” Sawko shared.

The space itself has a very urban and subtle feel with plain concrete flooring, untreated wood for the interiors, black steel-framed windows letting in a cloud of natural light and a wrap-around terrace and courtyard area with authentic furniture pieces.

“It’s also about how we’ve been living all these years. We both come from backgrounds where you have live materials and what we don’t like in Dubai is having all these fake materials and impersonal materials and that is something that we dream to avoid,” de Moutaudoin explained.

“For us, this place is very personal,” Sawko added. “We’ve put our all into it, all our personality.”

De Moutaudoin also confided that the two are very interested in collaborating with designers, artists and architects in the city, offering the creative professionals discounts on furniture and home accessory purchases at Comptoir 102.

“Of course, we won’t be able to collaborate with every kind of designer, because at the end of the day, what we have here is a style and some may not be able to appreciate it as it is different. One has to have, what we call, a European sensibility,” Sawko said.

“It’s a lifestyle,” de Moutaudoin added. “We like the idea of a lifestyle.” 

