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Handcrafted gems

Finance professional-turned-designer Shima Samaei is behind the heritage-inspired brand Chapter-101, whose pieces bring together the evocative beauty of the Middle East region



Tell us about yourself and how you founded Chapter 101? I was born and raised in Iran, Tehran to Kurdish parents. I moved to Dubai with my family 20 years ago to pursue a better education and upbringing. I initially began a career in corporate finance, working in various corporations.

As the years followed, I turned back to design, driven by the challenges of self-creation. Which is when I decided to dedicate time, for a year, to my design project while still working full time. The opportunity of being able to travel and see different cultures while being exposed to design and architecture gave me the driving force that I needed to share my ideas and turn them into reality.

In 2018, I finally decided to leave the corporate world. I launched my practice, Chapter-101, creating bespoke design pieces rooted in Middle Eastern culture. Last year, I enrolled in a Master's degree in Interior Architecture and Design, and have recently graduated. I have always been eager to continue learning in every aspect.

What inspires Chapter 101? Artistic and cultural influences of heritage motifs from the Middle East and Persia, mostly. Chapter's purpose is to create soulful pieces that have contemporary functionality, while upholding an enduring sense of value. The pieces are what I wanted to see and believe in, shared with people.



How do you create the concepts for your collections? I hand sketch almost every day. Naturally, I discard most of the drawings; only a few of them make it to my laptop, where I reproduce them in 3D. I then take them to the workshop and build mock-ups to picture the materiality of each piece. When I can, I bring them to my living room, seeking an emotional response with the décor and space. I imagine how the same response could reach people.

What materials do you typically work with and why? Marbles, brass, copper and all unexpected, imperfect organic materials that are distinguishable from other high-volume brands. I admire natural textures and the earthy feel they give. I have recently been studying a lot about sustainability in design and hope to apply it to Chapter's pieces and projects, adding further value and durability.

Where are your pieces produced and is there an element of craftsmanship involved? Chapter's workshop is located in Sharjah, where I have gathered a few brilliant helping hands who are marble, wood and metal specialists that bring out the best in craftsmanship. Our collections are primarily handmade and call for ancient skills and techniques. Some materials such as marble are very delicate and I am always grateful for the heavy work that the artisans put into creating the pieces.