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## GULF NEWS

### Vibrant Stimuli: Karim Rashid's Penchant For Color And Curves Shines In His Creations



**S**uperstar designer Karim Rashid is consistently creating a plethora of designs and objects to fill his ever-expanding portfolio of mind-bending work. Whether it be furniture, complete interiors, a juice bottle or a credit card, you can be sure that there will be plenty of colour and curves to stimulate your day.

In his own words, "So much of the world is grey or beige and very generic. A lack of stimuli creates lethargy, routine breeds boredom and conformity brings with it complacency."

If his aim is to bring vibrancy and life to the world, he is certainly doing a great job. This innovative designer never takes a break and at the moment is working on a variety of exciting projects around the globe. These include a plastic surgery clinic in Seoul Korea, a children's clothes' shop in Moscow and the function rooms for the 600-room Baiyoke Hotel in Bangkok.



Adams, Scott. "Vibrant Stimuli." *Gulf News*, July 22, 2011.

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Rashid stands out in a crowd not just because he is more than six feet tall but because, since 2000, he has only worn white, with the occasional splash of pink. "Around the millennium I decided to take all my dark clothes and drop them off at the shelter for the homeless. I didn't have a conscious plan to create an image for myself — it was mainly a strange, angelic feeling of getting rid of darkness, shedding the uniform of the urbanite." He topped off the new look with original Alain Mikli glasses and owns six prototypes of a pair worn by a blind woman in the Wim Wenders film *Until the End of the World*.

A true multinational, Rashid was born in Egypt but moved to London with his parents soon after. The family moved again — he was 7 then — to Toronto, Canada, where his father took up a post as a set designer. Creativity and artistic daring came to Rashid when he was a young boy and he learnt how to use a sewing machine before he was 10 and enjoyed making his own clothes. He also spent hours sketching his mother's belongings and this love of drawing led to him design objects for the family home. A loner at school, it soon became clear that this unusual child had an even more unusual brain. He started the school newspaper, radio station and yearbook — and he wore only pink. "I was into designing and making my own clothes, and used to dress in pink from head to toe," he says. "I dyed my hair pink. I even used to wear pink nail polish." Pink is still his preferred colour and dominates his work.

Taking his creativity to a formal level, he studied Industrial Design at Carleton University in Ottawa and pursued graduate design studies in Naples, Italy. Student life was hard and he paid his way through college by working as a DJ in clubs and at a local record store. Rashid still DJ's for events and parties and was recently spinning LPs at an event at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. After completing his studies, he took up a number of design jobs and even spent a while teaching, but at 31 he was broke and there seemed to be very few opportunities to move ahead. Living true to his dream he decided to take the plunge and start his own design firm. He opened his office in Manhattan in 1993, and the rest is history.

In the past 20 years Rashid has designed just about anything that can be designed, and today, more than 3,000 objects bear his

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name. His work includes restaurants and hotels from New York to Dubai, high heels in Brazil, vacuum cleaners and modular furniture in Korea. More recent projects include the new flagship store for Giorgio Armani and manhole covers for the sewers of New York. His work has been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Design Museum in London.

One of his most spectacular spaces was created in Dubai. Full of bright colours and curves, the restaurant Switch, set in the Dubai Mall, cocoons diners while they enjoy their meal. "I wanted it to be a strong, symmetrical design," Rashid explains. "The curved walls, which then wrap around to become the ceiling, create interesting patterns of light and shadow similar to what happens on sand dunes."

Every visit to Switch is composed of views, smells, tastes and sounds, and the five senses create individual backgrounds for a truly amazing global dining experience. The backlit ceiling artwork consists of stylised, inspirational Arabic phrases. The continuous wave seating provides an efficient and dynamic operating system. The final result is a powerful, clean space that offers a beautiful perspective. The interior was partly inspired by the Middle Eastern desert. "Switch is a small oasis in the big city, a place to relax and indulge your five senses," he explains.

Born in Cairo in 1960, this talented designer still has strong roots in Egypt. In a singular project, he designed a complete house, including the interior spaces, all the furniture and contents. Komb House was presented at the Cairo Design and Furniture Expo last year as an ideal dwelling that utilises technology to create traditions, customs and a sense of family and community. The outer shell is composed of a repetition of reclaimed wood fins. Each is set at a slightly different profile to the next to create a dynamic, fluid quality to both the outside and inside walls. Due to their angles and depth, the fins create a play on privacy. Composed of four spaces, the interior represents our main activities: play, eat, sleep and cleanse. The central space, inspired by Islamic patios, features an oasis with skylight and centre plunge pool.

Ecology and using the world's resources wisely are some things Rashid is interested in. His ideas for creating a better world are incorporated into Komb House through solar panel-heated water, energy-efficient appliances, reuse of pluvial and grey water,

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low-energy LED lighting and raised radiant flooring. The house can be easily disassembled and its materials, such as wood, metal, glass, and solar panels, can be reused.

Across in Asia, for the Cupid jewellery store at Orchard Central in Singapore, Rashid was inspired by the very gems and body adornments that people come to purchase. The interior is multifaceted and the reflections and angles provide an altered reality along with some fun and fantasy. Adding a touch of glamour to the shopping experience, the organic space is trimmed with silver, gold and black. Three hundred and sixty-degree “blob” display cases catch the eye and are as arresting as the pieces displayed within them. A multilevel space, Rashid designed the layout to ease the movement of customers through various areas while creating a different environment in each.

In his latest project, which took more than three years to design, he has created the interiors, furniture, wallpaper and even the designs for the bed linen and curtains for Nhow Hotel in Berlin. “When I first saw the building, it was empty. A blank canvas waiting to be worked on,” he explains.

This is his largest hotel project to date. As a regular traveller — he spent 180 nights in hotel rooms last year — he knows what can make for a great stay and what can cause guests to feel uncomfortable.

In the Nhow Hotel, set on Berlin’s River Spree in the über-trendy Friedrichshain district, you will find some of Rashid’s philosophies of aesthetics put into practice. “Straight lines don’t exist in nature,” he explains “The curve is a much more sensual and inspiring form.”

One of the highlights of the hotel is the free-form reception desk, which is in fact a 14-metre-long fibreglass bubble. Rashid did the same with the breakfast buffet. Crispy croissants and fresh fruit are presented in the voids of an elongated, hot pink, globular form. “I want these shapes to be fun, to take the seriousness out of checking-in and to give people an opportunity to start the day with colour,” he says as he moves into the hotel’s lounge, which is decorated with another example of furniture designed to amuse — namely round-bottomed stools

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that rock back and forth as you sit on them. Music is an integral part of the Nhow Hotel in Berlin — there are two professional recording studios — which means you will most likely be rubbing shoulders with international musicians during your stay. Guests can borrow an electric guitar to create their own vibes and, in the rooms and suites, the possibilities for personal music enjoyment are endless via the iPod and in-house music and entertainment systems.

Working across the Atlantic in America, he brought together his personal style and Asian design elements and collaborated with two top restaurateurs, Stephen Starr and chef Masaharu Morimoto, to create a 160-seat dining room, private lounge and sushi bar in Philadelphia. Taking his inspiration from traditional Japanese design, he added organic curves and soft lighting. Bamboo was the wood of choice and, when matched with glass, white leather seats and backlit sculpted plastic on the walls, the effects are decidedly cool.





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His latest piece, and one which is available to the public, is called the *Knowledge in the Brain*. These unusual bookends offer both a clever and a stylish way to holster your reading material. Made out of rubber-coated stone resin, the head splits in two to allow you to place the books in between. Rashid decided to coat the space occupied by the brain with gold leaf. "This acts as a metaphor for the value placed on an educated mind," he explains. Hoping to spread his philosophy of living, his book, *Design Your Self: Rethinking the Way You Live, Love, Work, and Play*, explores his general life philosophy. "It's about this notion that we can shape our destiny," he says. "We have a lot more control over our lives than we think we do."

Rashid gets passionate when he starts talking about his dreams for the future. He would love to get involved in making all forms of transportation more comfortable and pleasant. "Today we spend so much time travelling by car, taxi, train, aircraft or boat, within cities, between cities and around the world," he says, "but transportation in most cases is uncomfortable, stressful, full of toxins and wasteful."

Rashid believes passengers deserve better and that design and technology can help change the experience, so that, instead of dreading a journey, we can look forward to it. The gentle designer's humanitarian side also shines through when he begins to discuss what projects he would like to get involved in. "There are endless possibilities to design for people who are living in difficult conditions," he stresses. "I'd like to work on housing, furniture and urban spaces to make the life of these people easier."

"I want to change the world," Rashid once said. Today his designs are more and more visible and he is on the verge of becoming a household name. You are sure to come across his work as you dine, sleep in a hotel or use one of the many household objects designed by him.