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id 50 / Celebrating 50 individuals who have made positive contributions to design and architecture across the Middle East and North Africa

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Celebrating contributions to design and architecture across the Middle East and North Africa

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For its 200th issue, *identity* pays tribute to 50 individuals who have made positive contributions to the development of design, architecture and culture across the Middle East and North Africa. The list includes design and architecture professionals who have furthered these fields within their respective countries or have expanded the legacy of design onto the world stage. The list also celebrates individuals who have helped establish platforms – be it governmental institutions or design events – that further enhance the development of design and architecture within the region, while maintaining a positive outlook into the future.

From creating notable buildings that have put the region on the map, to developing signature interiors and products that are propelling the crafts industry forward and preserving the region's cultural and architectural heritage, the individuals on this list have time and time again, proven their commitment to furthering design and architecture in the region and abroad.

Hailing from countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Jordan, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Sudan and France – these 50 individuals present some of the strongest voices within design and architecture across the MENA region today.

HE Shaikha Mai Bint Mohammed Al Khalifa

Bahraini politician and government minister HE Shaikha Mai Bint Mohammed Al Khalifa is a leading figure in the Arab culture and art scenes, having spearheaded national efforts to develop infrastructure in the Kingdom of Bahrain for heritage conservation and propel the growth of sustainable tourism in the country. She is currently President of the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities and has previously served as Minister of Culture from 2010 to 2014, Minister of Culture and Information from 2008 to 2010 as well as Assistant Undersecretary for Culture and National Heritage at the Ministry of Information. Holding an MA in Political History from Sheffield University, she has been awarded the Creation and Heritage Prize from the Comité Colbert as well as the Watch Award by the World Monument Fund in 2015 for her role in the preservation and protection of culture and heritage in Bahrain, the first-ever Arab personality to receive the recognition. In 2017 she was made the Special Ambassador of the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). As the founder of the Shaikh Ebrahim bin Mohammed Al Khalifa Center for Culture and Research and Chair of its Board of Trustees since 2002, she works actively to foster culture and preserve the traditional architecture of Bahrain. The center has since conserved and rehabilitated over 25 traditional Bahraini houses and spearheaded the urban regeneration of the historic city of Muharraq. Amongst her myriad achievements have been the inscriptions of the Qal'at al-Bahrain, the Pearling, Testimony of an Island Economy and Dilmun Burial Mounds as UNESCO World Heritage Sites in addition to the founding of the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage, a UNESCO Category 2 Centre.



Nabil Dada

Lebanese interior architect Nabil Dada studied at the Libanaise des Beaux Arts with already a number of small-scale interior decoration projects under his belt. Shortly after, Dada opened his store, Schemes, in West Beirut – being one of the only two stores in the country to stock contemporary furniture and fixtures, also supplying demand in Saudi Arabia. Through championing brands such as Tekno,

Rosenthal and Saporitti, the store grew into Dada & Associates through which Dada established close ties with a number of Italian furniture manufacturers. Due to the civil war in Lebanon, Dada was forced to relocate to Saudi Arabia which brought him a succession of projects, and through which he established connections with gilders, embroiders, carpenters and other craftspeople in Italy and Lebanon, enabling him to put his own stamp on the more classically-oriented projects that were commissioned to him during his time in The Kingdom. Since relocating back to Beirut, Dada & Associates has grown into a sizeable practice with recent projects including the new Beirut souks cinema and the Beirut Yacht Club as well as Al Amin Mosque. While the practice may be best known today for its mastery of the classical style – Dada is mostly partial to the Midcentury Modern style and many of his earlier projects in Beirut are an homage to it. This may be why, even at their most ornate, Dada & Associates' projects possess a degree of simplicity associated with modern design.



Nada Debs

Nada Debs is a Lebanese designer living and working in Beirut and whose work spans from product and furniture design to one-off commissions across craft, art, fashion and interiors. Debs grew up in Japan, studied design at the Rhode Island School of Design in the United States and has spent significant periods of time living and

travelling the world, finding connections between different cultures. What ties her work together is her ability to distil culture and craftsmanship to create pieces of emotional resonance. She calls her approach “handmade and heartmade”. Fascinated by the role of the human hand to tell stories and to evoke a sense of belonging, she describes craft as a feeling that goes beyond geography, language and culture. Debs opened her first showroom in the Saifi district of Beirut in 2003. Her work embodies various crafts and techniques found across the Middle East, presented in a contemporary language and often interacting with global techniques and crafts.

LOCAL IS THE NEW GLOBAL. Debs was the first designer from the Middle East to have a solo show at the Rossana Orlandi gallery during Milan Design Week in 2018. She is also known for supporting artisanal crafts, with one of her projects – the ‘You and I’ rug collection commissioned by the Fatma bint Mohamed Bin Zayed Initiative (FMBI), being created in collaboration with female carpet weavers in Kabul, merging traditional techniques with a contemporary application.