

wknd.

culture club
can the UAE rebrand itself?





W {the cut}

Bespoke Bootlegs

why UAE women are faking it

mcqueen • catwalk politics • stella

design revolution



Interior design fascinates us all. Its promotion to a belief system is one of the most compelling cultural phenomena of our age. Interior design isn't about basic function or frivolous style — it's all about creating a fiction of social status. It's just our view of status that changes with time. We may think our home is a machine for living in, but in fact it's a text that can be read like a play. Possessions become weapons in the battle of social competition.

All our anxieties and aspirations are revealed by our choice of salad bowl or kettle. You cannot hide behind your shabby sofa, Corbusier chaise or Philippe Starck lemon squeezer. They betray you. Every single artefact writes a line about its owner: nostalgia, desire, aspiration — the story of all our lives.

But at least you can re-arrange the furniture and change the plot. A major buzzword in interior design is 'character', as decorators eschew potentially bland minimalist items in favour of objects with character and personality. "Signature" pieces are key to achieving this distinctive look but they don't come off factory production lines at any price: vintage is preferable, unique is ideal and a story involving a bargain buy is always a plus.

The qualities of these market finds are 'unexpected', 'interesting' and 'desirable'. Small wonder

that street markets are now the retailers of choice for the design-aware. Homeware retailers could help themselves by daring to distribute work by young designers.

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The contribution that design has made to cultural and technological progress is without question. But such progress in home design is slow because of the unwillingness of retail channels to change the way they do business

cultural progress is unquestioned. However such developments are slow in home design precisely because of this resistance from retail channels. An unwillingness to take risks — largely due to the slow rhythm of replacement purchases and the weight of

our cultural legacy — keeps new products out of sight of the general public, forcing designers to sell direct, at higher prices. This is frustrating for consumers keen to discover new objects, as home design is for everyone.

Taking a leaf out of clothing and technology stores would be a breath of fresh air for home interiors outlets, reflecting the spirit of the times — and exploit the opportunity to develop sales through innovation and renewal. All it takes is courage.

Economic downturns don't bode well for sales of purchases such as furniture, but at last year's Milan Furniture Fair — the main event on the interiors industry's annual calendar, which is set to take place next month — the mood was optimistic, and the dominant theme by emerging designers and established brands was 'survivalism' and how designers can help everyone navigate the perils of contemporary life. The recession will create opportunities for designers to help people adjust to economic austerity. It makes sense that design — which strove to build a better world during the 20th century — should be dominated by such concerns. Moving from a material culture to one in which designers are applying design thinking to analyse problems, will redefine design in 2009.