

Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council Press Kit – Milan Design Fair 2023

Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council is an organisation that was established under an Amiri decree by His Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, and is chaired by Her Highness Sheikha Jawaher bint Mohammed Al Qasimi, wife of His Highness the Ruler of Sharjah.

Irthi’s mission is to empower women practising traditional Emirati crafts through capacity-building programmes and access to new sustainable markets, whilst preserving and protecting its cultural heritage for future generations. By representing both traditional and modern crafts across the MENASEA and Central Asia regions, working with partner organisations and championing artisans and designers, the Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council is looking to empower women professionally and socially. The council aims to provide a fresh narrative for women by developing new market opportunities and sectors as well as delivering social development programmes and vocational training, while taking care to preserve the skills and rich cultural heritage of the UAE for current and future generations.

Irthi has been forging cross-cultural collaborations, with more than 500 artisans and 9 contemporary crafts collections, through five initiatives that are targeting everyone from children and youth to aspiring artists, designers, entrepreneurs, and established artisans, and positioning the tangible and intangible heritage of the region at the future of the luxury industry engaged in the traditional crafts of Talli, Faroukha, and Safafah.

Irthi’s bold vision to open dialogue, share skills and explore new alternatives, has led to collaboration opportunities with several multi-sectoral entities, expanding the scope for networking and embracing new knowledge.

**About Sharjah, UAE**

Sharjah, one of the seven emirates of the United Arab Emirates and is also recognized as a city of Crafts & Folk Art for the craft of Talli in 2019 by UNESCO’s Creative Cities Network. From ancient archaeological sites that are thousands of years old, to cutting-edge contemporary art exhibitions, Sharjah not only champions authentic Arabian life, but also works hard to integrate it into its modern landscape. The many heritage sites, museums, art galleries, and preserved traditions collectively make this emirate a historical treasure.

**About Irthi’s participation and collections at Milan Design Fair 2023**

Together with the creative consulting studio Mr.Lawrence, Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council will present the exhibition **Echoes of Alchemy** during Milan Design Week 2023, running from April 17 to 23, 2023, in the apartment at Via Cesare Correnti 14, part of the 5VIE district.

The exhibition demonstrates the on-going effort to question and uncover ways of making and consuming within the domestic and built realms; highlighting the pivotal role various ingredients and craftsmanship methods have played within the Emirati topographical and constructed environments.

The traditional recipes for construction and food can be considered equally intuitive, yet an attempt to breakdown, document, and redesign such recipes whilst formulating them into the context of a space sheds light on our shared cultural heritage. Referencing a locus and its traditional methods of Excavation, Harvest, Preservation, and Craftsmanship – all in direct relation to Gastronomy, Architecture, and Design – is a continuing education on the true meaning of sustainability.

**Architecture of Culture**

* Irthi curated an experimental research for its Design Labs II initiative: in which the first year focused on a research fellowship with the American University of Sharjah’s College of Architecture, Art and Design
* Research assistants delved into a series of urban mappings of various environments in the UAE, creating innovative recipes for construction that became in themselves a contemporary format of “craft”.
* The result of this fellowship is a growing material library of recipes that redefines, reinterprets and reimagines the future of vernacular materials and crafts of the UAE to be carried forward and explored by artisans, makers, designers, and architects on a macro scale.
* Aimed to revitalize craft preservation's role in the Emirati community's sustainability.
* Invited architects, urbanists, curators, researchers, artists, educators, geographers, biologists, chemists, and craft specialists across MENASEA to contribute.
* Concept of environment mapping was developed into four main subtopics: Palm Oasis, Desertscape, Waterscape, and Mountainscape.

**Design Labs II | Collection**

* The exhibition design is based on the recipes created by Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council (ICCC) and the American University of Sharjah’s (AUS) Design Labs II research fellowship.
* The exploration of Emirati local materials, local architecture methods, and local crafts, shaped this exhibition design
* Exhibition idea is conceived by Civil Architecture and designed by Mr.Lawrence studio.
* Through the use of local materials such as the palm sheath, frankincense, sand, oyster shells, and limestone-based bricks and tiles create an architectural scenography of sculptural columns and tiled panels

**Recipes for Future – A Cross-Cultural Alchemy**

* In-depth gastronomy research carried out by Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council, Mr. Lawrence, and CasalinghediTokyo.
* Developed into recipes with CasalinghediTokyo and into tableware in collaboration with StudioPepe, and Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council’s designers: Reem Saif Almazrouei, Eman Al Rahma.
* Designed a narrative culinary experience that brings together contemporary rituals and forgotten traditions to translate personal food recipes into a shared meal experience.

**Recipes for Future – A Cross-Cultural Alchemy | Collections**

**Thaya Collection Drop**

**Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council x Reem Saif Almazrouei Emirati Safeefah x Sadu**

* The collection translates the gastronomy research into a collection of Emirati inspired tableware of different weaving techniques and motifs inspired by the United Arab Emirates crafts heritage of Al Safafah (palm frond weaving) and Al Sadu (wool textile weaving).
* Consists of tableware items such as food covers and trays of varying sizes and colour palettes.
* Designed and assembled by Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council in collaboration with the Emirati multi-disciplinary designer Reem Saif Almazrouei

**Bahri Collection Drop**

**Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council x Eman AlRahma Emirati Al Gargour x Clay x Leather**

* The collection translates the gastronomy research into a collection of Emirati inspired tableware items from Al Gargour craft
* Gargour was traditionally crafted by male artisans using weaved metal wires for fishing purposes
* Gargour baskets in this collection are repurposed and incorporated into the Emirati dining experience
* A set of clay covers has been designed to complement the Gargour baskets to be used as food preservation items.
* Designed and assembled by Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council in collaboration with the Emirati designer Eman Al Rahma.

**Sofra Collection Drop**

**Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council x Studiopepe Emirati Safeefah x Al Zaffanah x Faroukha x Clay**

* This collection looks into returning to the Emirati original methods of food preservation and reviving ancient techniques that are still of relevance.
* It experiments the use of clay craft in relation to Emirati weaving crafts.
* Consists of tableware items used for preserving and fermenting food, cooling jars, sprout towers.
* Designed and assembled by Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council in collaboration with StudioPepe.

**Food Installation and Dining Experience**

**Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council x CasalinghediTokyo**

* This installation examines the social and cultural aspects of food, by putting forth into an interactive set up
* The innovative recipes derived from the research in an edible sculptural format.

*All recipes are designed by CasalinghediTokyo.*

**Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council Collections**

**Thaya Collection Drop**

**Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council x Ghaya Bin Mesmar & Mermelada Estudio Emirati Safeefah x Al Zafanah**

* This collection is the second iteration of the chair collection designed by Ghaya Bin Mesmar in collaboration with Laura Blasco, Juanmi Juárez, and Alex Estévez from Barcelona-based Mermelada Estudio
* The collection is a result of a continued exploration of palm based weaving techniques, dyes, and materials by Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council in collaboration with the Emirati designer Ghaya Bin Mesmar
* The result is a collection of chairs in leather, palm fronds (Khose) and linen using Al Safafah and Al Zafanah crafts.

**Thaya Collection Drop**

**Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council x Ghaya Bin Mesmar Emirati Safeefah x Leather**

* This collection is the second edition of Safeefah mats from Thaya Collection Drop that explores the Emirati craft of Safafah by using new techniques, materials and colors.
* The square mats in this collection are inspired by “Al Gaheef” the Emirati “hop scotch game”, as

a means to preserve intangible heritage of the United Arab Emirates.

* The modules are designed by introducing new materials and simplified techniques of weaving to create a contemporary mat design reminiscent of terrazzo tiles once assembled.