

COMMERCIAL

# Interior design

The essential guide for Middle East interior design professionals

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# Sister act

SIBLINGS SUMAYA DABBAGH OF DABBAGH ARCHITECTS AND EFFA AL DABBAGH, FOUNDER, EFFA FASHION, COLLABORATE ON A JOINT PROJECT

**W**hen Effa Al Dabbagh, founder and designer of Effa Fashion asked her sister Sumaya Dabbagh,

of Dabbagh Architects, to come up with a design for her first store in Dubai, she focused on the brand's logo of a bright fuchsia flower to create a concept.



## CASE STUDY: EFFA BOUTIQUE

Sumaya is a Saudi architect educated in the UK with experience in architecture, interior design and project management spanning over 18 years. She set up her company, which focuses on design aspects such as light, space, and materials 'in relation to the human scale as well as the human experience of space', in Dubai, in 2008.

"Effa's brief was very simple, and simplicity makes the best projects. It was to provide a modern interior that would reflect the essence of the Effa brand," she said.

"The space had to accommodate display rails and shelves for womens' ready to wear, abayas and accessories. Changing facilities, a back office and storage space was also required."

The flower, symbolising beauty and femininity, became the focal point for the space, in the form of a custom made carpet as a centre piece. Gold, the brand's colour depicting rays of sun and illustrating luxury was translated into vertical fins that form the structure of the display units. The circular arrangement of the display unit in the space reflects the soft, feminine aspect of the brand.

The result is a contemporary interior that is faithful to the philosophy of Dabbagh Architects as well as the essence of the Effa brand.

"As soon as the location was established, the countdown of a three month period started," added Sumaya.

"Meeting such a challenging deadline was made possible by the clear and well-formed vision of the client.

"The design was completed in six weeks, construction in another six.

"From a retail point of view, it is essential to present the merchandise in the most attractive way possible to maximise sales.

"Important considerations such as lighting and product placement were, therefore, carefully studied."

According to Effa, founder and designer of the fashion brand, her aim in opening her first boutique was to provide an enjoyable shopping experience for her customers.

"It was important for the design of the boutique interior to reflect the Effa style philosophy, and Dabbagh



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1 The chandelier was from Al Salhiya Lighting Centre.

2 The shop's flower logo appears on the door.

3 Carpet from JAB Middle East.

4 The shop has a contemporary feel.

Architects did an excellent job in translating this style architecturally into a retail space," she said.

"The interior design concept is contemporary and timeless and can easily be applied to other Effa boutique spaces in the future.

"The way that the interior concept was designed also makes it flexible and easy to develop should the brand diversify into other product ranges.

"The result was a space that is the perfect complement to my products,

reflecting the brand image and providing my customers with a stylish and relaxed luxurious retail environment where they can feel comfortable browsing through the collections, enjoy trying things on and making their purchases."

Effa added that she felt fortunate to have a boutique office designed by her sister. The building and the space reflect their main ethos of high quality design: in the materials used and its attention to details.

The sisters were born in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, but grew up in the UK.

Effa is the youngest sibling out of six. Sumaya was the fourth child. Together they have four sisters and one brother, including a sister, Hanan, who used to teach interior design.

"It was a very exciting time to be able to work with such a close family member. We have a mutual respect and understanding. I know Effa's personality very well and her brand essence and she understands my approach to design," said Sumaya.

"Our goals are completely aligned. We both have an interest in each other's success as well as our own.

"In addition, as we are both in creative fields, we were able to have very good rapport and brainstorm ideas together during our design meetings. It was a fun time."

Although Dabbagh Architects launched in 2008, Sumaya has been working independently since 2004 and completed many projects ranging from residential to commercial.

"My first independent project was a residential one. A young modern Emirati family approached me for the design of their own home. The villas they occupied needed to be remodelled to fit their changing lifestyle," she said.

"Being an architect, I enjoyed working on a project that required a refurbishment of the interior spaces to fulfill new requirements and needs.

"When I initially started working independently, my early commissions were interior fit outs.

"Having previously worked on large scale projects, such as the Childrens' City, in Dubai, I enjoyed working on the details of a small scale project.



## CASE STUDY: EFFA BOUTIQUE

### EFFA STORE SUPPLIERS LIST

**Carpet:** Custom made in Germany by JAB Middle East

**Wooden flooring:** UK, supplied by Aim Pro Middle East FZE

**Light fittings:** Al Salhiya Lighting Centre, Dubai, UAE

**Chandelier:** Made in Italy, supplied by Al Salhiya Lighting Centre, Dubai.

**Loose Furniture:** Clients own supplier

**Reception counter and display cabinets:** Custom made by Contrast LLC Interior Design & Decoration

**Signage:** Exact Sign, Dubai, UAE

“This kind of work helped to form strong relationships with clients that would continue to flourish and provide an invaluable insight into what makes a project successful.

“Design is not the only criteria, we are also in the business of providing a service. I believe the quality of our service is what attracts repeat clients to return for further commissions as well as new clients through word of mouth and personal recommendations.”

Her first building commission was started in 2007 and completed in 2010, where she developed a boutique office building in Al Barsha 1, Dubai.

It also houses Dabbagh Architects' offices. Sumaya said she felt fortunate to have her offices in a building designed by her own company.

Speaking of the boutique, she said the design of Effa Fashion went very smoothly, but her main challenges were during the construction stage of the project with its contractors.

“In this difficult market, we found that sometimes contractors overstretch themselves and their resources by over committing to too many clients, in order to compensate for lower prices due to the slow economic market.

This meant that we faced frustrating delays. The contract's initial duration was four weeks. However the actual duration was stretched to six weeks,” she added.

“In retail, trends tend to come and go fast, a bit like fashion.

“At Dabbagh Architects we tend to focus on producing a design that



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5 Display rails for womens' abayas and accessories.

6 Exterior shot of the boutique.

responds to the client's needs and the project's unique criteria, rather than following fashion.

“Following popular styles blindly is akin to being a fashion victim. We aim to produce designs that are not affected by transient styles and trends. Our ultimate aim is to produce timeless design,” she added.

Dabbagh Architects is currently in the design stage for several projects in UAE. These are commercial as well as residential types of work.

It also looking at expanding into the Saudi and Qatari markets as there is considerable growth in various sectors in those countries at present.

It recently added two new members to its team; a structural engineer and an architect who will work on projects further afield.

“We are excited by the prospects and look forward to completing new fulfilling and prestigious projects and developing fruitful relationships with new clients,” said Sumaya. 