

# SPACES THAT CREATE STATEMENTS

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Bright, airy and fresh is the perfect setting for a livingroom – achieved here! Layering of rugs, art, soft furnishings among books and accents all give a cozy feeling which is just the perfect place to relax after a long day in Cairo.





Architecture is not only form, it is also function. The circulation and practicality of the building prove the success of the design. The materials, levels and finishes used blend in perfectly with the interior and makes the place look complete.

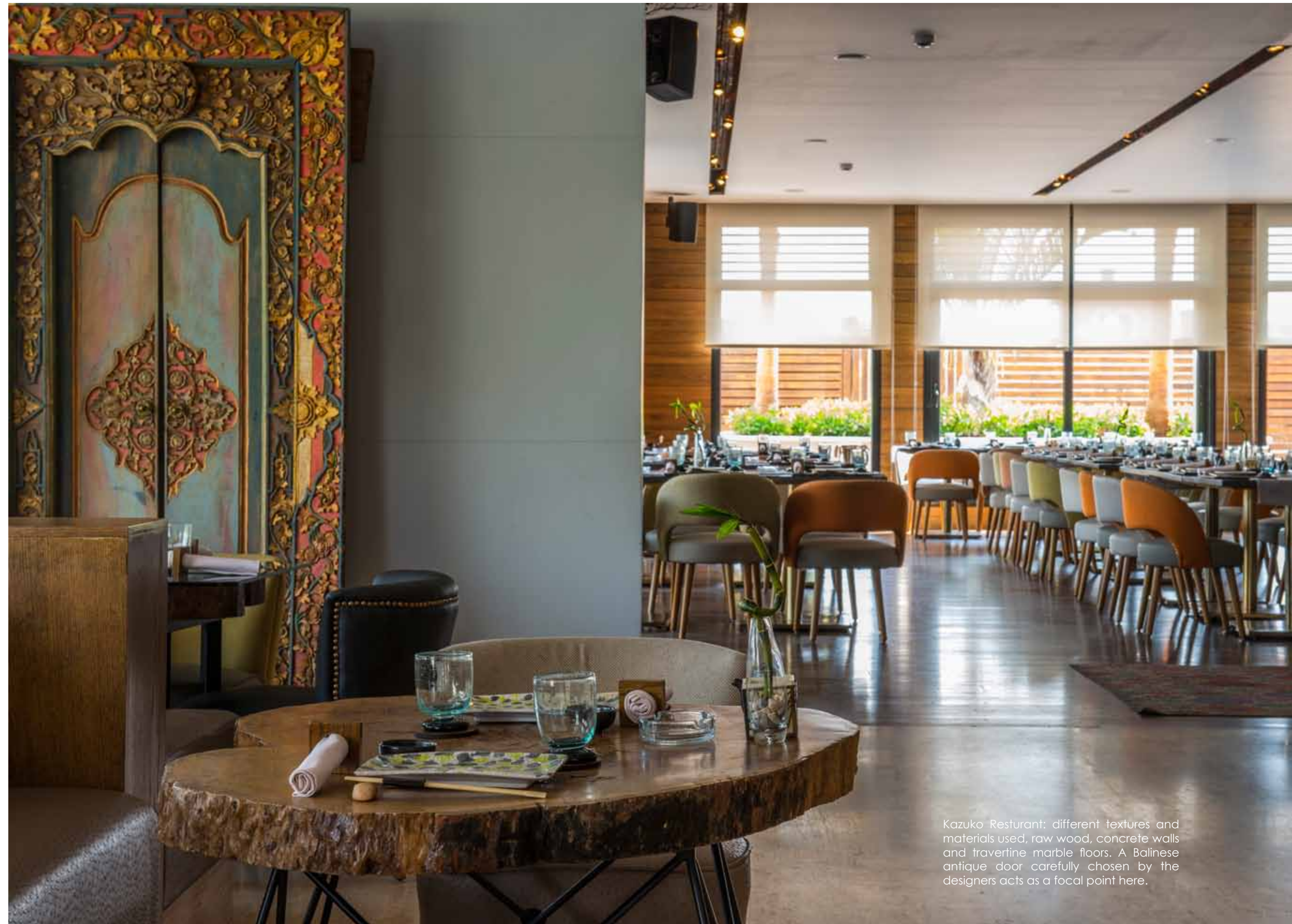
Ahmed Khalifa (Architect) and Shereen Helmy (Interior Designer) are a young husband and wife team that is beating the odds and making a name for themselves in Egypt and soon internationally. The headquarters of their architectural firm KH Studio located in Heliopolis is in itself a testament of what they stand for; cutting edge, clean lines, natural robust yet alluring materials, sophisticated, state-of-the-art, functional, comfortable and aesthetically appealing. They have been inspired by renowned interior designers and architects such as Mies Van Der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright, Kelly Hoppen and Sir Norman Foster.

Currently they have eight employees who serve as assistant architects, they happen to all be women. It just turned out that way, they were the best qualified candidates. Ahmed and Shereen are presently working on 20 plus projects which are all at different stages, from beginning architectural drawings all the way through to completion and interior design finishing touches.

The couple work together with ease, drawing on each other's strong points. They work together on each project but always allow the other to take the lead depending whether the job is chiefly architectural or essentially interior design. They focus mainly on residential homes, restaurants and new office spaces. They have also done show rooms for real estate companies.

Ahmed and Shereen's work has become well known and very appreciated in the Katameya area where they designed the Swan Lake Clubhouse, indoors and outdoors, including Kazuko Japanese Restaurant and the Shinko Bar, all of which have become landmarks that have definitely uplifted the area and created a cosmopolitan vibe that did not exist previously.

One of their signature projects is Kazuko Japanese restaurant located in Katameya. Using magnificent granite and marble, they incorporate different cuts, finishes, grains and polishes to achieve a fabulous modern textured look. Inserted wall shelves are adorned with artifacts that make the client feel as though they are in their own living room. The wooden flooring gives great warmth and is inviting. The restaurant is very popular



Kazuko Restaurant: different textures and materials used, raw wood, concrete walls and travertine marble floors. A Balinese antique door carefully chosen by the designers acts as a focal point here.



**Left:** Gouna apartment – KH studio custom designed and executed all furniture in this apartment. They used light tones and different textures which makes it an ideal weekend getaway.

**Below right:**

Entrance to the showroom – wood paneling used to give warm and luxurious feeling – custom designed reception desk using flamed black granite – contemporary Egyptian art contrast the paneling.



photo by: Bilo Hussein

The designers – a photo of Ahmed and Shereen next to their custom designed concrete steps.

not only for its cuisine but for the warm welcoming sophisticated atmosphere that Ahmed and Shereen have achieved.

Another great achievement is the Shinko Bar, certainly one of the most popular bars in Cairo today. This project was a challenge because the couple had to convert what was once a lounge into a bar. They had to link the bar to the kitchen through the basement without changing the original look of the building and in such a way that clients would not see or be disturbed by servers. It was quite an engineering feat. The bar has an urbane refined feel that could be found in any great metropolitan city. The original flooring is wooden, however this had to be altered in the bar area for practical reasons. A mosaic of tiles was laid and fitted piece by piece like

a puzzle to be integrated with the wood. The result is spectacular, artistic and erudite.

We want to create a life style for our clients. We want them to use the entire house, it should be a nice comfortable environment and every corner of the house should be enjoyed. We are trying to change the way of thinking. In the old times, here in Egypt, large reception rooms were shut and only used during visits by guests. This meant that at least half of the home was not used much.

“We want our clients to enjoy the entire house. We believe a home can be beautiful and also comfortable and utilitarian. We don’t want our clients to sit in one room upstairs living their life, while the entire downstairs reception salons are closed. No, we want them to enjoy their life and their home and feel

nature. This is why we bring the green areas, trees and plants very close to the house. We design the home to be open and full of windows so that the outside nearly comes inside and one feels at peace with nature.” Also we feel that a house needs time to adapt and change. We believe that with time your home becomes part of you and should become more comfortable with each passing year.

The philosophy of KH Studio is clear to see in the architectural renderings of Swan Lake Residences Villas, yet to be constructed. Guided by the developer’s needs and a restricted budget, KH Studio designed six different villa models. The target was a modern aesthetic look, not exactly minimalist but perhaps inspired by Miami or Southern California. There are contemporary straight lines and multiple levels that lead the eye upwards. Every





Wood, black steel, travertine marble, only three materials used, yet the space feels luxurious and timeless. Furnished using contemporary iconic Italian furniture, sourced and brought in especially for the project. Accented by Egyptian art work, which gives the space a unique feel.



Layering different materials and colors. Wood paneled walls, brass coffee table over a turquoise decolorized rug and finally the art work.

room has at least one window looking outside, including the room designated for a live-in-maid. This is as it should be. The windows are large inviting the outside in. The kitchens are not the open American style, but rather a traditional kitchen that can be closed. This they feel is important because of the Egyptian style of cooking and entertaining. A closed kitchen does not allow the strong smells to invade the rest of the house. Importantly, every kitchen has very good ventilation and windows that look onto the garden bringing in light and fresh air.

As designers they feel that the real challenge here in Egypt is in finding resources that are not always readily available, as well as the skilled workers needed to accomplish the job. This is particularly true when it comes to design elements such as a chair, lighting fixtures or hardware. "Because things are often not available here we make them. But it is not easy. We have to design it, build it, finish it, polish it and use it." And if you want to import something special it is not always easy and it can be very expensive. The other challenge is to stay within the budget. "We must be innovative in every way. Lacking the resources and the skilled workers found elsewhere, we are forced to think outside the box. It puts you on another level, an innovative level."

While Ahmed and Shereen are working exclusively in Egypt today, they recognize that there has always been an international influence in Egypt. For example, when UNESCO organized an international competition for the architectural design of the Alexandria Library. Snøhetta, a Norwegian architectural office, was selected from among more than 1,400 entries. The Norwegian team used local granite and was greatly inspired by the history of the ancient Alexandria Library, creating a massive sun disk in front of the sea.

Ahmed and Shereen believe they have what it takes to enter such international competitions. They are very well trained and have acquired a great deal of experience over the past twelve years here in Egypt. We must keep an eye on them as they spread their wings in the future. Ω