Istanbul, Turkey

Istanbul is a city of chaos, improvisation, and irony, where a canon of calls-to-prayer ripples through a secular republic five times a day. Megaprojects born of an unsustainably strong economy rule the day: The city is carving a 30-mile canal—a second Bosporus—from the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara and a cross-continental metro tunnel, from Europe to Asia, beneath the strait. Last fall, Turkey’s first design biennial took imperfection as its theme and gave the world its most comprehensive catalog of Istanbul’s rich polyphony of ad hoc design. This city of 13 million may be one of the oldest in civilization, but its history of modern design is just getting started. Here we take a look at some of Istanbul’s established and emerging talents, along with the design destinations they favor.

By Shonquis Moreno

1. AYASOFYA HÜRRREM SULTAN HAMAMI
    Cankurtaran Mah., Bab-ı Hümayun Caddesi, No: 1, Sultanahmet/011-90-212-517-35-35
    Built by chief Ottoman architect Sinan in 1557 and later used as a makeshift jail and then a carpet bazaar, this bathhouse was returned to its original purpose in 2011 after a 101-year hiatus and a $10 million facelift. Picture snowy marble surfaces, blond wood, gilded accents, and opulent geometries. ayasofyahamami.com

2. VAKKO LIBRARY
    Küçük Pazarı Caddesi, No: 35
    Inside the tumbling cubes of the REX-designed Vakko Headquarters and Power Media Center, the Vitali Hakko Creative Industries Library offers a handsomely stocked and up-to-the-minute catalog of visual culture for scholars and the public. vakko.com

Looking at Istanbul’s old city from the trendy neighborhood of Beyoğlu, one can see the Hagia Sophia at left (rebuilt for the last time in the 6th century) and the 17th-century Sultanahmet (or “Blue”) Mosque with its six minarets at right.

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Dwell traveled to Turkey’s most cosmopolitan city for the first annual Istanbul Design Biennial, discovering a modern heart beating within ancient walls.
Byzantium Boom

The former Constantinople isn’t all Ottoman-era carpets and ruins: A cutting-edge art, dining, and travel scene overlays its rich past.

4 SALT
SALT Beyoğlu, İstiklal Caddesi No: 136, Beyoğlu/011-90-212-377-42-00
Museum, gallery, and exhibition space Salt doesn’t just archive art and design; it makes them. Look for films, lectures, and eclectic interiors by young designers, as well as cafes, bookstores, and even a rooftop garden by Fritz Haeg. saltonline.org

6 ARMAGGAN
NURUOSMANİYE
Nuruosmaniye Cad., No: 65, Nuruosmaniye/011-90-212-522-44-33
This luxury emporium keeps traditional Turkish craft alive by commissioning modern jewelry, textiles, food, housewares, and fashion from regional artisans who work with local materials and age-old techniques. armaggan.com

5 GEORGES HOTEL
GALATA
Serdar-I Ekrem Sokak, No: 24, Galata–Beyoğlu/011-90-212-244-24-23
This one-year-old hotel features a popular bar where expats and locals gather. Rooms are decked out with sleek marble bathrooms, modern furniture, and lighting that’s been handcrafted by Turkish woodworkers and metalsmiths. georges.com/en

7 EGERAN GALERI
Kemankeş Mah., Tophane İskle Caddesi, No: 12A, Beyoğlu/011-90-212-251-12-51
A booming local art scene prompted Turkish American (and former White Cube staffer) Suzanne Egeran to cofound Galeri Manâ in 2011. Now she has gone solo with an eponymous space. Look for its distinctive undulating glass facade. egeran.com

Paratoner

The interior designers at four-year-old firm Paratoner hung their shingle in Istanbul’s Tophane neighborhood—the city’s oldest industrial zone—amid a slew of art galleries, dilapidated wooden houses, and small workshops. From its design studio located directly above a street-level showroom, the group makes furniture and lighting that are chunky and colorful, clean-cut but voluptuous. Make sure to watch the stop-motion furniture animations they produce, including one featuring a marauding gang of Rubic table lamps (right) in natural oak and epoxy lacquer. paratoner.com.tr
Superpool
A philosophical designer based in Beyoğlu relies on handicraft, woodworking, and the universal meaning of nature.

Supercerebral, that is. Turkish, scarf-covered Selva Gürdoğan, 33, and tall, pale Dane Gregers Tang Thomsen, 38, founded architecture firm Superpool in 2006. A 2003 graduate of SCI-Arc and an alum of the Aarhus School of Architecture, respectively, the couple met while working at the Rem Koolhaas Office for Metropolitan Architecture. One of five studios selected to participate in the Audi Urban Future Award 2012, Superpool researches how to mix robotics with concrete. Their book, Mapping Istanbul (left), will prove a boon to local architects, planners, and policy makers alike. superpool.org

Tardu Kuman (above) says his work is strongly rooted in classical thought: “In philosophy, the same concepts have been reinterpreted since ancient times,” he says. “Wood and metal have been in our lives since then; they are the same materials, but you can always express something new.” Aesthetically, Stoa eschews dainty in favor of raw, rugged, and industrial. A chain mail–like armchair (above left) is made from stainless steel assembly-line components, while his wind chimes and sculptures incorporate found machine parts (even a massive iron drill).

Tardu Kuman spent a lot of time thinking about things before he began making them. In college in Istanbul, he studied philosophy—Heraclitus, Nietzsche, Deleuze. Becoming a full-fledged designer happened gradually and took him full-circle from mid-1980s Paris, where he made jewelry, to 1990s Athens, where he made art objects and furniture out of salvaged railroad ties, and finally, in 1995, back to Istanbul to found Stoa Design.

Today, traditional craftsmanship may be suffering locally, but it creates an opportunity for makers like Kuman to practice old methods with a modern touch. He incorporates new forms to show the ability of natural materials, like the hot metal he pours into knots set in wooden tabletops. “In this complicated life, I want to make things simple,” Kuman says. “My work doesn’t belong to a time, a trend, a fashion. It has the weight of honesty.”
Pattern Play

*Geometric motifs taken from a centuries-old document still serve as inspiration to Istanbul’s contemporary designers.*

By Gökhan Karakuş

Tucked away in the labyrinthine hallways of Istanbul’s Topkapı Palace is a medieval document that, 600 years after it was written, sheds light on the city’s burgeoning contemporary design scene. The 98-foot-long Topkapı Scroll is a compendium of 114 individual geometric patterns for wall surfaces and architecture. Used by craftsmen responsible for building the Islamic world, the scroll illuminates the role of geometry as a primary design conceit for the area’s hybrid Eurasian culture.

Today, that same geometry is a subtle but strong undercurrent for many craft-based Istanbul designers, marshaling a uniquely Eastern way of working in the modern world. Furniture designer Sema Topaloğlu modifies wood-carved motifs from her native Caucasus region into obtuse constellations of circular forms. They are then translated into interior furnishings made by both tradesmen and university-educated designers in her Ottoman-era stone warehouse. Aziz Sarıyer, a designer known for his spare and clean lines, has scaled two-dimensional geometry into three-dimensional modular furniture components for his Istanbul-based furniture company, Derin, founded in 1971 and now run by his son. And for the past decade, Parsons-educated jewelry designer Ela Cindoruk has obsessively transformed the radial patterns found on paper doilies into assemblages conceived as brooches and necklaces. Attracted to the timeless, universal qualities of these motifs, Cindoruk says, “These patterns have been adapted to the materials of their times for hundreds, even a thousand, years. Marble and stone decorations are seen today on ephemeral materials like paper and plastic.”

topkapisarayi.gov.tr

Lab Tasarim

Making their Tophane storefront work overtime, Lab Tasarim’s architects and interior designers also run a furniture showroom. The aesthetic is upcycled modern: On a second glance at the work, visitors realize that the designers have inventively Frankensteined their furniture together out of found objects—from bedsprings and tea trays to brass pipes and mismatched chair legs. Lab Tasarim exemplifies a recent trend toward using retail to showcase experiments concocted in the “laboratory” of a practice in the hopes of attracting potential architecture and interiors clients, who then also find gems with which to populate their newly fashioned spaces. labtasarim.com