



LIFESTYLE
Istanbul, Turkey

Tamer Köşeli

One of the young leaders in illustration today, Tamer Köşeli follows his own rules





Along with Köşeli, the Levent district of Istanbul is home to Istanbul Sapphire – the city's tallest skyscraper

Just like his illustrations, Tamer Köşeli appears graphical, clean-lined and brimming with subdued character. He wears round tortoise-shell eyeglasses, a button-down shirt (buttoned up to his neck) and a full auburn beard, neatly trimmed. Like his icons and logos, he packs a lot of expression into a compact form and minimal colour palette: this afternoon, his shirt is grey, his trousers rust-brown, his sneakers a high-pitched celadon mesh. He is working over a herbal tea at a blonde wood table in a bakery at one of Istanbul's tonier shopping centres. Tomorrow, he will be working in a living room-like café called Journey in Cihangir and then, in the afternoon, at a friend's office in Pera.

Istanbul, in the broadest sense, is where Köşeli makes illustrations for the likes of Monocle, Ikea and The Wall Street Journal, identities for boutiques like 290sqm and the telecommunications giant Avea, and icons for Popular Mechanics magazine or apps like imhush.† He's also made an 'Op Art' meets 'Arts and Crafts' typeface called Zarif and another called Pattern that generates abstract visuals while still managing to spell out words. Pattern, like much of his work, is based on pared-down graphical components that, if used in combination, produce images

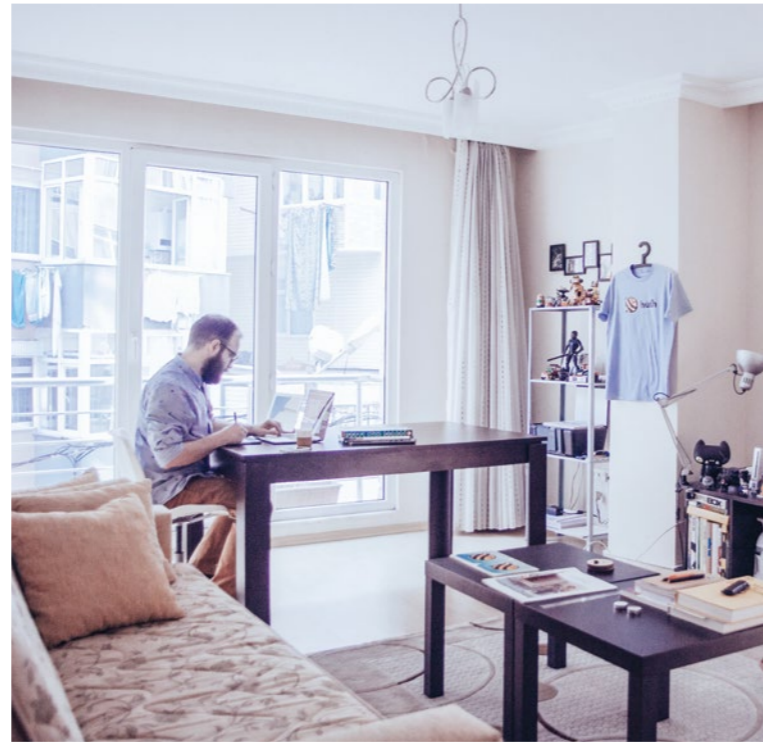


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† As well as appearing on the front covers of magazines, Köşeli's work has been exhibited at Salone del Mobile Milano, Istanbul Design Week and in Singapore's 'An Ordinary Project' space

‡ Inspired by the way that musical notes form something of a pattern when put to page, Köşeli's Pattern typeface sought to create the same effect for a song's written lyrics

like lace: baroque but legible, and underneath it all ingeniously simple.‡ Partly because he's a bit OCD, and partly because he's not often there, Köşeli's apartment is really really clean. Mostly he only goes home – in a neighbourhood where an influx of luxury towers and swank shopping malls is colliding with a humble jumble of illegal residential additions – to do laundry, sleep or pick up a change of clothes. 'I go to public spaces to work because if I stay home, I feel as if life is passing me by,' says Köşeli who, although he grew up in French-speaking Switzerland until the age of nine and admits he'd be hard-pressed to speak French today, speaks English with something closer to a French accent than a Turkish one. Flanking the TV in the living room are DVDs – the work of Polish director Krzysztof Kieślowski and 'Taxi Driver' on one end; Chaplin on the other – and a phalanx of character toys: Tintin and a red Lucky Luke kit, modular vintage German figures and muscle-bound Tequila from 'Lucha Libre'. Both of Köşeli's parents are Turkish. After living in Switzerland for decades, they returned to Turkey when they became homesick. 'I expected to go back to Switzerland because I was always missing the way we had lived there,' Köşeli shares. He and his sister worked hard to learn Turkish and adapt to a different education system. He spent a lot of time at home, drawing and poring over the architecture books of his father, who was a builder. 'In Switzerland, everything is in order, but Turkey is



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TAMER KÖŞELI



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Köşeli is also exploring product design. Period Clock is his first venture – a minimalist timepiece composed of three moving circles: one large, making up the main clock face, one medium that rotates to indicate the hour, and one smaller, that fits within the latter to indicate the minutes. Köşeli has launched an online version of Period Clock while he works hard to get the design off the ground



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completely different,' he says. 'There's no grid. When I started to study design, I was always trying to follow that [Swiss] grid. After a while I began to find it boring and I started trying to break it, but that just created chaos. Now, I try to balance the two.'

Today, Köşeli has come to appreciate the rich unpredictability of disorder. Visiting Zurich for exhibitions of his work in 2013 and 2014, he felt homesick – for Istanbul. 'In Zurich, there is too much calm, too much order, after a while I get bored,' he says. 'In Istanbul you have rules, but you have exceptions that make the city beautiful. There's so much potential here.'

Köşeli tends to seek balance by dovetailing extremes. While studying fashion at Anadolu Üniversitesi, when his friends were taking their ideas to tailors, he was hunkered down at the sewing machine. But fashion involved 'too little problem-solving', so he tacked on a second degree in industrial design and found himself constantly expanding his assignments to resolve all aspects of his products: packaging design, logos, typefaces. In 2010, he founded his studio. His first international illustration assignment

was a cover for Knack Weekend, a Belgian weekend supplement, and after doing a guide to living in Turkey, he began working with Monocle on a regular basis.

Köşeli's training in 3D design constantly informs his work too. 'I always try to mix everything I know, all of my background,' he says. 'When I illustrate a character, I have to dress them in clothes, so I think about the fashion. For me, it's natural to think like this.' He plans to contribute to a t-shirt collection for which a friend asked him to do the graphics, but for which he will also design a shirt. Last year, he designed a minimalist concept clock that an Istanbul workshop didn't want to make, as it fell beyond their comfort zone of crafting traditional clocks. Now he's making a timekeeping app – periodclock.co – before he makes the physical clock, but the experience confirms principles that Köşeli already practices. 'I learn how to do things myself and make them part of my job,' he says. 'And I like to think of every project as a whole – not just the surface, not just the parts.' When designing a logo, as he did for Zurich store 290sqm, Köşeli imagined this identity everywhere – on paper, on shelves, on fabrics –

looking for continuity. This continuity also helped the interior designers of the store, who used the 45 degree angle – which formed the basis of Köşeli's modular identity design – to create the diamond shape of the shop's equally modular furnishings and lighting.

Köşeli also thrives on setting obstacles for himself. 'I could make anything I want, but I want to be specific, and follow my rules. I always ask the client too many questions before I start to work, but all those constraints make my style. If I don't have those obstacles, then I have too much freedom and I lose myself.'

Ironically, it was during his mandatory military service, assigned to an armoured division for which he clerked and drew maps, that Köşeli began to write his own rules in every aspect of his life. 'Before my military service I was so shy that I couldn't speak English to someone or work in public – now I push myself to do those things. I decided: I have to experience many things, I have to break my habits,' Köşeli says. 'Before my service, I was always complaining about everything, but afterward, I started trying to solve problems.'