

The Middle East's architecture, design, interiors + property magazine

# identity<sup>®</sup>

ISSUE 181  
YEAR SIXTEEN  
NOVEMBER 2018  
A MOTIVATE PUBLICATION



Colour wash: new bathing spaces with a splash of colour  
Countdown to Downtown: exclusive Dubai Design Week preview  
Simply the best: celebrating the 2018 **identity** Design Awards winners  
+ Design Pioneers Part One: presenting the UAE's dynamic entrepreneurs

DHS 25.00 OR 2.70 BD 2.60  
SR 25.00 KD 2.10



62911001741137

# DESIGN PIONEERS

by **id**entity<sup>®</sup>

---

PART 01

## The Entrepreneurs

“ I am always attracted to clean lines and finding a sense of serenity and timelessness in each space we do. ”



Merete Broen + Patrick van IJzendoorn

# ZEN INTERIORS

## PATRICK VAN IJZENDOORN + MERETE BROEN

**A** spirit of adventure brought Dutchman Patrick van IJzendoorn and his Danish wife Merete Broen to Dubai in 1995, with just one rucksack. When the enterprising couple came to decorate their new home, having been in Dubai for eight years, they could see there was room in the market for cost-effective, quality interiors completed with care and attention. This inspired them to set up Zen Interiors in 2003, which was achieved through mortgaging their family home and maxing out credit cards. Zen Interiors' success was due to their shared skills - Patrick's background in start-up businesses and Merete's design aesthetic - and a combined vision of creating harmonious living spaces, whether for residential use or hospitality purposes.

Initially a product-based retail outlet, Zen Interiors represented Box Living - unique solid wood furniture using mahoganies and American oak, run by another pioneering Dutch friend based in Jakarta - but now stocks furniture and accessories from over 15 different companies. Patrick and Merete's steady, sustainable approach to business was matched by trial and error and lots of hard work. "Each arm of the business has grown out of a client need that wasn't being met elsewhere in the market, leading Zen Interiors to provide it ourselves," says Patrick. "For example, some of our investment clients wanted us to dress their properties for re-sale, which led to the home-staging service; and we are preparing to launch our online store by the end of the year. Every expansion seems to happen organically to address a specific need in the market."

Thus Zen Interiors evolved from retail to turnkey projects, and from complete interiors to bespoke design projects. Projects in Emirates Hills, The Palm Jumeirah, Al Barari and Jumeirah have served as visually impressive business cards, showing the company's design range and reach. Of special resonance are two projects, to design penthouse projects in Le Reve, Dubai Marina and Tiara Aquamarine, The Palm in 2012-2013. Both were recognised with awards nationally and internationally. In total Zen Interiors has won 15 prestigious awards for its projects.

Zen's team has grown to include designers, architects and craftsmen, and now has a staff of 30. Patrick and Merete place priority on being involved in the day-to-day running of the business, to retain the personal feel of the company.

While they are inspired by designers such as Arne Jacobsen, Philippe Starck and Verner Panton, they also admire the smaller design firms and designers that continue to come up with unique designs, keep to deadlines, engage their staff and have happy customers.

This sensibility is matched by their social conscience. Zen Interiors has always given back, with more than ten years' ongoing support for Gulf for Good - the charity initiative run under the patronage of HH Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum. Specifically, Zen Interiors has supported a project in Nepal called Mission Himalaya/Ecofarm, and Patrick and Merete and their two daughters fly out every Christmas to donate clothes and essentials they have collected in Dubai.



**Q: What's your design philosophy?**

**A:** We are always attracted to clean lines and finding a sense of serenity and timelessness in each space we do.

**Q: How do you define your unique selling point?**

**A:** For us, it's always been about giving our clients the personal touch. We're a family-run firm and we, the owners, are quite hands-on, overseeing most parts of the business. We have a great team of 30 people and they care of the initial consultation, the design conception stage, the construction and right through to the final dressing of the space and the handover. We are involved the whole way through, though.

**Q: What lessons have you learned as pioneers?**

**A:** To be able to survive and do well in Dubai, you have to learn to adapt - and fast. At least every six months we evaluate the market and see what is going on around us. Originally we started out as a retail shop before moving on to doing bespoke design using branded furniture. Nowadays we also get involved with complete renovations and re-designing existing homes. We were lucky that before the economic crashes happened we had a few years behind us, to build a steady client base and reputation. As a result we actually did very well under the circumstances. The lesson we learned was to stick to what we are good at.

**Q: What do you like most about working in the UAE?**

**A:** The energy and speed of the UAE is compelling, and keeps you on your toes. In other countries it would take years for buildings to be completed; here the skyline is changing on a weekly basis, which creates a really vibrant environment for those in the design industry. The country is attracting world-class designers and because of that the standard and expectation of excellence is there, too.

**Q: How do you see the market evolving?**

**A:** From our launch in 2003 to now, the market in the UAE has evolved exponentially; not only are the projects so much more detailed and prolific now, the standards in the industry are becoming better regulated and there really is a demand for quality rather than just affordability. People are viewing the UAE as a long-term place to settle, so with that we have more homeowners looking to create a home that will stand the test of time, style-wise and quality-wise.

**Q: What does luxury mean for you?**

**A:** Attention to detail and quality. You can have the most luxurious item in the world but if it has a fleeting shelf-life in terms of aesthetic appeal or quality craftsmanship then it's not luxurious, it's a waste. Luxury also means passion; in the creation of a luxurious item or space, someone has been passionate about what they do in order to create it.

**Q: What's next for Zen Interiors?**

**A:** We are looking to expand the Zen Interiors brand in the GCC and internationally but we have held off so far, preferring to keep growing organically, and retaining full ownership and decision-making [involvement]. However, we are in talks at the moment with two investors to take Zen Interiors to the next level...

## MILESTONES

**2003**

Zen Interiors launched, initially as a retail space on Sheikh Zayed Road

**2012**

Wins Best International Interior Design, for an apartment in Le Reve

**2013**

Wins Best International Interior Design 'Private Residence', for a villa in Nairobi

**2016**

Completes largest residential project overseas for a private villa in Uganda of 465 square metres

**2017**

Wins Best International Interior Design 'Show Home' for a villa on Pearl Jumeirah

**2018**

Celebrates 15 years in business and growing from a team of two to 30