Jwana Hamdan, founder and creative director at Jwana Hamdan



"Creating has become an ongoing process through which I rediscover memories I didn't know I still carried with me," Jwana Hamdan. Photography: Raffaele Grosso

The Lebanese Italian entrepreneur and founder of her eponymous outdoor furniture brand left Lebanon at the age of five, but fragments of her childhood stayed with her long after she had made a life elsewhere. She still remembers the smell of spices drifting from grocery shops, the late-afternoon adhan and family gatherings. There are more intimate recollections too: a neighbour arriving every day to exchange news on the balcony and her beloved *teta* turning over a coffee cup to read her destiny. Decades later, these memories began surfacing in her work. “Creating has become an ongoing process through which I rediscover memories I didn’t know I still carried with me,” she says.

Middle Eastern imagery, Bedouin weaving and poetry often provide Hamdan a starting point, while Italy brings the discipline of product design, materials and proportion. “From Milan, I learnt that creativity alone is not enough,” she says. “What makes the difference is having access to the knowledge, industry and skilled hands that can turn a vision into reality.” Building the brand became a form of work that led Hamdan to delve deeper into her own history, from Lebanon and the Phoenicians to regional traditions she had once overlooked.

Translating a memory into an object is perhaps clearest in the brand’s Majlis seating system. Named after the traditional Arab space for receiving guests, its low, generous proportions and modular form turn the idea of gathering into furniture, allowing seats to be rearranged according to the number of people and space around them. Yet Hamdan rarely interprets her references literally. For example, the Emir sofa has rope knotted by hand in macrame around stainless-steel backrests, bringing a tactile craft technique into an otherwise contemporary structure. The Amar and Shams coffee tables – which translates to moon and sun in Arabic – pair iroko-wood legs with marine-grade okumè plywood tops, whose textured surfaces are applied individually by artisans using a mixture that incorporates sunflower oil-derived polymers, natural aggregates and recycled materials.

At a time when AI can generate images and concepts almost instantaneously, Hamdan is increasingly concerned with preserving the human knowledge required to make them a reality. “Knowing how to design something is not the same as knowing how to make it,” she says. As digital tools advance, craftsmanship and knowledge passed between generations become increasingly valuable.