

COMMERCIAL

# Interior design

The essential guide for Middle East interior design professionals

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# Funky Business

Founder of THE One, Thomas Lundgren, talks to CID about injecting glamour back into design and his humble plans for global domination of the home furnishings market

**S**pending an hour in the company of Thomas Lundgren is both inspiring and utterly exhausting at the same time; his energy and zest for life, for design and for originality leaps out from every sentence and increasingly from the shelves of his quirky and dramatic stores across the UAE.

**CID: What is your attitude to THE One furniture design?**

Design should be theatre. When you walk into a place you should be saying 'wow, wow, wow.' But THE One did not start off like that, our first store in Abu Dhabi was so different. We tried so hard to be the antithesis to Ikea, but our first store in the first six months embodied all that we were trying to avoid. The first store was 6000 sq.m, which is three times the size of the Jumeirah store, so we had to fill it with a ridiculous amount of things, and it looked like a warehouse shop, a lot of glass and when my first shipment arrived it scared the hell out of me how little space it took up in the store!

**CID: Why are you hiding behind your hands?**

Because it was so awful! It was the

opposite to what I was trying to achieve, but I didn't know how to get there. I had never been a purchaser before, I had to make it up as I went along. I knew I wanted to create a new approach to interior fashion, but I had no idea what I meant by that or how I was going to do that.

**CID: How would you describe your design philosophy now?**

Design is about instinct. My attitude to design is to be playful and witty, not looking too planned, a sort of effortlessness. You need passion in everything, and that is the philosophy of my style, much more than a particular colour or material. In this era of globalisation, everyone has access to the same manufacturers across the world, so to be different you can't just rely on having unusual products; it's the whole experience, the feeling you get that sets us apart.

**CID: Is that why you call your stores 'theatres'?**

We want to be magical, dramatic. The theatre thing started a year ago, we want to entertain our clients. We call this Magicology, in which we ask you

to suspend all reason and we aim to induce astonishment and wonder. The kind of feeling one gets from watching the sun rise or set. When you enter our stores from the back, from the staff areas, there is a sign that says: "Warning, you are about to enter a stage, and you are about to act now, so wake up."

**CID: You call your customers 'fans', why is that?**

There is a crucial difference between a customer and an engaged customer. We view the relationship with our customers like the dating before a marriage, we have to get them interested, keep them interested and keep them faithful to us, and having good products is only a part of that. We have to keep the relationship exciting, but it's always the consumer that controls the relationship; they can walk away at any time.

**CID: Can you tell us about the concept of 'Masstige'?**

Having worked for Ikea, I knew the merits better than anybody of offering cheap, accessible, mass-produced furniture but I wanted to create something that changed all the time, and was a little bit more exclusive — a sense of

1. CEO (Self-proclaimed Chief Emotional Officer) of THE One, Thomas Lundgren.



elitism, and that is where THE One is placed — the sweet spot between Mass and Prestige — Masstige.

**CID: What is on the drawing boards of your designers for next season?**

A major theme for us next season is the burlesque. Stemming from the Moulin Rouge and incorporating the themes of vaudeville and cabaret, the emphasis is on sexy design. Velvets, lace, satin, plush textures, flocking, fringing, tassels, chandeliers and hooded lamps. Burlesque combines materials with imagination, surface with depth, context with content, masculine with feminine. We can see this style already in Dubai in places like Boudoir and Buddha Bar. Other styles we are featuring next season are Organic and Rock n' Roll.

**CID: What is it about the burlesque that appeals to you?**

I'm attracted to the burlesque because it is a teasing sort of design; it inspires a feeling of decadence, voluptuousness, playfulness, theatricality. It's big, bold,

eye-catching, comical, nostalgic. Titrilating — I like that word.

**CID: So is Burlesque a theme that you're going to keep for one season, or is it going to be a mainstay in your product line?**

It may stay for a couple of seasons we'll see, but if it stays longer it becomes boring, we'll be like Ikea then with the same dull catalogue. My role as a leader is to move things on.

**CID: Is there a type of interior design that you don't like?**

There was a time when less was more; minimalism was the credo of creativity, but I don't like minimalism, I need to feel a sense of history, emotion, passion in design.

It is so hard to furnish a space from scratch with everything new because if everything is from this one moment in time it will become nothing more than a museum. Spaces need to have a feeling of evolution. Every space should have a different soul.

**CID: When was the last time you said**

**"wow" when you entered a place?**

I tend to dissect interior design, for me lighting is one of the most important aspects to a well-designed place. The right décor, furniture and furnishings can look so wrong with bad lighting. I think The Royal Mirage is the best hotel in Dubai, but the lighting is too flat. The same applies with Harvey Nichols, it's too bright and stark. For me, the lobby in Emirates Towers is an example of having perfect lighting and all the right components which all gel together. Actually, we are seriously thinking about opening a THE One hotel, which will embody our ethos of good, sexy design.

**CID: Finally, what are your thoughts on the state of the interior design retail market?**

There are too many 'karaoke' designers and retailers around — people who are satisfied re-interpreting another person's work, I am not happy being a second-hand copy, I always strive to be a first hand original, and that is what I believe drives design onwards. Mindless repetition is for parrots. ☑

- 2. Natural and organic is a theme for next season.
- 3. Faux fur, sumptuous flocks and dark hues are in the stores this summer.
- 4. Bright accent blues are used to contrast against the natural oatmeal tones.
- 5. Black, red and pink fuse the themes of gothic with the burlesque.
- 6. Black and white monochrome tones make for a dramatic bedroom setting.