





Hany Bassiouny



Hashem Montasser

Best + brightest

Founders of The Lighthouse, Hany Bassiouny and Hashem Montasser, reveal how they created a unique design destination in Dubai's D3.

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Alive with dedication, passion and vision, purveyors of design culture Hany Bassiouny and Hashem Montasser have created a destination like no other in Dubai: The Lighthouse.

The powerhouse recently celebrated its first anniversary, having been launched in January 2017 by the former financiers, who teamed up with renowned chef Izumi Ani to create the multi-sensory design and food concept that's located in Dubai Design District (d3). Their dynamic space contains hand-selected items – glassware, serve ware and travel and lifestyle accessories, as well as books and *papeterie* by international and regional designers – that follow the principles of minimalism, timelessness and functionality.

Like their platform, the duo's design philosophy reflects the special vision that navigates their brand. "The Lighthouse' as a name is a nod to the great Virginia Woolf and her seminal novel *To the Lighthouse*. My mother did her PhD on Virginia Woolf, so, in some ways, it was a tribute to her as well, and to her love of culture and reading. Woolf and the Bloomsbury Group would gather around freshly made meals to brainstorm and share ideas," says Montasser.

But there were specific needs in Dubai that also propelled the concept.

"It was a friend's 40th birthday and I was looking for the perfect gift that would combine an aesthetic I like, utilise high-quality materials and be fully functional. This was very hard to find, so we decided to fill this gap by creating a place that offers gifts and a non-rushed experience where people can meet like-minded others by sharing a meal," he explains.

Clearly, he was not alone. Since The Lighthouse's launch, its list of design brands has grown rapidly from 30 to 50. Creations from local, regional and international designers are on offer, many of them exclusively in the UAE.

"We really pride ourselves in having created this immersive food and design space where our guests can order anything – from the Piet Boon-designed plates their meals are served on to the Sophie Conran-designed cups they use to sip their coffee. Even our Gubi bar stools and lounge chairs are available to purchase. We are constantly on the lookout for emerging regional designers,

such as Aljoud Lootah (our neighbour in Building 6!) and Nadine Kanso," Montasser continues.

The duo's desire to collaborate is a huge part of their success. "We are big believers in the Bauhaus school of thought," he says. "We have collaborated with the likes of Christie's, the Art Dubai group, Vitra and others that we feel speak to our ethos and are worth showcasing. We run at least one activation a month where we collaborate."

Despite their rocketing success, they have certainly encountered challenges. "We realised we cannot be all things to all people," says Bassiouny. "For example, our resident DJ, John Hanlidis – whom we met in Mykonos, and who is responsible for curating our music – is very popular with our customers (to the point that we released his playlists on SoundCloud), but some guests believe the volume should be higher and others want it lower. So, generally, accommodating everyone's needs while managing every-day operational tasks seems to be the most demanding part of managing our space," he explains.

Their ability to be attuned to their customers' needs has paid off exponentially. "Our biggest surprise so far has been how quickly our customers 'got' the concept and were converted into repeat customers; and many are from the d3 community. And His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum has chosen The Lighthouse as his lunch spot four times within the span of two months. What an honour for us and the entire team!" they both excitedly explain.

When asked about their future plans, Montasser responds with humour and humility. "The Lighthouse will be taking over the world, naturally! Just kidding... or are we?" he quips. "For now, we feel happy where we are in d3, and we will continue to build on our early success. And as d3 grows, so do we. We're a lifestyle brand, so any future endeavours will be squarely focused on building this philosophy, to fill the void in our customers' day-to-day experiences." We can't wait to follow their bold ray of light. 