

# 10 *A Design* FOR ALL AEGIS

*It's all in the details for Kuwaiti-born London-based designer **Ziad Alonaizy** whose new Aegis furniture line is a lesson in timeless design, writes Ayesha Shaikh*

Aegis nesting side tables with marble top and brass wire. Also available as one or two tables  
Facing page: Aegis marble console table that can be used both front and back





I'm on the phone with designer Ziad Alonaizy, who is hard at work at his studio in St. John's Woods, London on a Sunday. "I'm working on a breakfast table for a penthouse in Lisbon as we're speaking," he tells me. For a one-man band where he handles all aspects of his eponymous Ziad Alonaizy Design himself, he has a lot of offer. "I'm my own brand," says Ziad, who was an orthopaedic surgeon before he settled into this line of work, with a post-graduate degree from Inchtald School of Design in London, whose alumni include Zaha Hadid and Nina Campbell.

Born in Kuwait to a Kuwaiti mother and Saudi father, Ziad lived in the country for 18 years until the 1990 invasion when he moved to the United Kingdom to continue studying medicine. It was there that he specialised in orthopaedic surgery, going on to work in the field for about 10 years. "I used to do a lot of painting at home, drawing, even creating small sculptures. I was very creative from a young age," he recalls. "I enjoyed and excelled at studying medicine and was getting the best jobs, but I didn't feel fulfilled."

And so, he ventured into the world of design. Given his meticulous training as an orthopaedic surgeon, Ziad sculpts each piece with great precision, seamlessly sewing his distinct design narrative into it. "As a surgeon, you give attention to detail that you see in my design. It's paramount for me that I go into the smallest details of what I'm working on," he notes. "People ask me if my surgical training infiltrated my design approach and I always say it has made me a person who thrives under pressure, is better at communication and has an eye for detail."

His company offers an impressive mix of services including architectural interior design, private commissions, consultancy, and a product line named Aegis that he launched with a range of Aegis 001 side tables at the international design exhibition Decorex in London last September. These elegant renditions of nesting tables are hand-made with a steel frame, brass wire and solid brass plates, and a marble top so exquisite, every vein on it splays in the right pattern.

Ziad has collaborated with a family of artisans in Italy to come up with finishes that change with time. "Not every table has the same finish. This is because I wanted each piece to be unique and have character," he explains. While the Aegis 001 side tables have become a mainstay of his striking suite of furniture, he introduced two more items in June this year, the Aegis P console table and Aegis M horizontal or vertical wall mirror. As you walk around the tables or the console, you're enraptured by their moving lattice effect that creates beautiful architectural lines. "With product design, you're just creating the object, but I want that object to be conversational and sculptural, a piece that engages the viewer," he comments. Aegis translates to 'protection' or 'shelter' and the furniture range draws on the concept of a bird's cage. "If you take two fingers and pry open the bird cage, you get the same effect as the one I create with the wires," Ziad explains. "The cage is representative of today's culture and the entrapment one feels by following social expectations and market trends. The bending of the wires and setting the birds free depict empowerment and the release

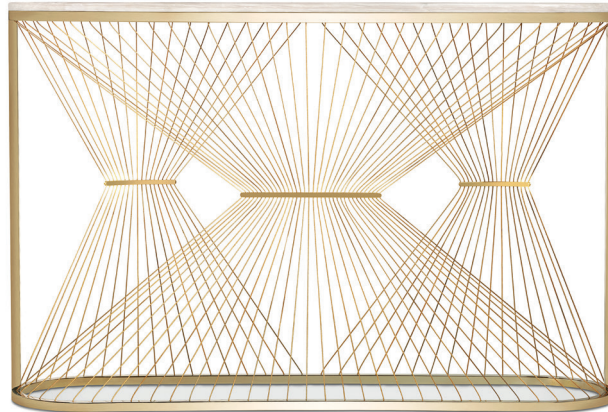
of ideas and creativity," he shares of his design philosophy that's greatly concept-driven and transcends market trends. Ziad also takes a cue from his Middle Eastern roots for the design, giving a nod to the region's penchant for the finer things in life. "Culturally, we love very high-quality things and luxury items," he says. "The quality of the materials, the marble and gold wire that I use are all representative of our culture and that's one of the main reasons why it's a feasible product for our region – it hits all these marks with our collective design aesthetic." Beautifully crafted with an obsessive love of details, the Aegis tables are deceptively simple. It took a year for Ziad to prototype his first design in 2015, with challenges boiling down to intricacies such as the choice and tension of wires. "It was very difficult to find the wire we use to make these pieces. It's not an easy choice because whilst I wanted the gold finish, when we used the brass braided wire, it kept breaking. I wanted to braid the wires I used because that way, each strand catches the light differently and makes the effect much stronger," he shares. The solution was to use steel and galvanise it, a costly process that takes about two weeks to complete for each piece.

To get the desired shape of Aegis pieces, a waterjet laser cutter slices through the steel by ejecting a waterjet mixed with fine sand that's imported from South America. Another company supplies the wire after galvanising it, and all the materials are then put together by hand. "This isn't a process that a machine can do because you've got to apply the right amount of tension on each wire to achieve the desired effect," he shares. "It was important for me to use good quality materials because the design deserves it and given its hand-made nature, I want it to last a lifetime. I design pieces to be loved, treasured and passed on from one generation to the next."

Splitting time between various projects, Ziad is currently involved with a series of private commissions that include a piece for a private residence in London, a private bar made of Calcutta marble and wires, and a breakfast table for a penthouse in Lisbon, and a table

for a high-end fashion boutique in Boston. He's also in talks with a company for a capsule collection featuring six to seven pieces that will be launched next year. He's soon to begin prototyping Aegis S, which are small tables that can fit anywhere within any interior. "For this set, I'm considering using something like Murano glass or maybe leather for the top, just to insert a different feel but it has to be organic."

On the interior design and architecture front, Ziad has been roped in to work on an apartment in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. With his portfolio becoming increasingly diverse, he hopes to engage more in retail hospitality design projects. "I'm not a decorator. I work on the complete architecture of a space including the electrics and plumbing, shape of the rooms, and where the windows sit. I'm open to working with companies and create designs for them." As Ziad shares his final thoughts, I wish him well for the design-filled day that lies ahead of him, with the hopes that we'll continue to see Aegis metamorphose into a brand for all ages. ■ *Prices at Aegis start from Dh8,116. Alonaizy.com*



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