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ARABIA

BREAKFAST
AT THE
GRAND
MOSQUE

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BILLION DOLLAR
BEAUTY

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GRAND DESIGNS

*Tiffany & Co design director **Francesca Amfitheatrof** reveals
her admiration for the UAE's architectural wonders and her
belief in the region's creative future*

*Words by **JULIA MAILE**
Photography by **AUSRA OSIPAVICIUTE***

The JEWELS



Francesca Amfitheatrof,
design director of Tiffany
& Co, at Sheikh Zayed
Grand Mosque, wearing a
mashrabiya-print abaya
by Endemage

The JEWELS



"The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque was phenomenal. It was incredible to see the craftsmanship, everything was imported, and to do mother of pearl inlay in marble is difficult, because mother of pearl is soft and marble is super hard," says Francesca



"WHAT'S INTERESTING IS HOW MUCH CITIES LIKE DUBAI ARE MIMICKING NEW YORK IN CREATING A CERTAIN ENERGY"

Francesca Amfitheatrof, design director



"We walked around the spice, textile and jewellery souqs and then went back by dhow boat. It was dusk and evening prayer... It was really a beautiful moment," says Francesca



Francesca Amfitheatrof is a woman with an impressive resumé. After stints designing jewellery for Chanel and Fendi and products for Alessi, she's the first woman in Tiffany & Co's 177-year legacy to land the revered role of design director. On her first visit to the UAE, she talks to *Bazaar* about design portfolios and people-watching at parties.

How does experiencing different cultures inspire you?

When I was younger, I'd take a precise element and be inspired by it, whereas now it's more of an overall feeling that comes out later and you think, 'Oh, I wonder where that came from?' People are inspiring and I find people-watching amazing. At our Tiffany reception in Dubai, we had Emirati ladies, women from the Gulf region and expats. And again, it's not precise like, 'They're wearing that shoe or dress', it's more of an overall sensibility to the refinement of the person, how they move, how they talk, or the turn of their voice.

Has moving from the UK to the US changed your design sensibilities? My first collection, Tiffany T, is influenced by a Manhattan woman. What's interesting to see coming here is how much cities like Dubai are mimicking New York in creating a certain energy. ➤



Francesca outside the Burj Al Arab

“WITH THE LOVE PEOPLE HAVE FOR FASHION, BRANDS, ARCHITECTURE, INTERIORS... EVERYTHING TO DO WITH DESIGN IS GOING TO DEVELOP”

Francesca Amfitheatrof, design director

In what way in particular? When you have these incredible buildings and skyscrapers, people all living in tight environments... Everything is moving and developing, everything is possible. It's something that's very New York, but it's what's happening here, isn't it? It not only creates business, but creativity as well. With the love people have here for fashion, brands, architecture, interiors... Everything to do with design and objects is going to develop.

How will initiatives like the Dubai Design District, d3, help? It's fundamental, as you need content. It's fine to bring people in at first to create the vision, but soon it's going to be talent from here that will make the difference. I'm sure 20 years from now, the next mosque will be made by artisans and designers based here.

You are a co-judge of the Tiffany & Co and Harper's Bazaar Student Fashion Design Competition. Do you think there is talent here? I've looked at the portfolios and some are really encouraging. I spent seven years in art school and while you're obviously driven by your teachers, professors and the level of projects, what you're really influenced by is the quality of students around you. You need to create an environment

for them to work, and I don't know how much of that exists here, yet. You see the lack of references, the lack of inquisitiveness and the lack of pushing each other forward. It's still naïve; it still needs to be developed. But that doesn't mean there isn't talent, you just need to nature it. Look at Louise Wilson at Central Saint Martins [in London]. She was one person, and look at what she did. She was brutal, but really warm. When I was in school, I definitely needed to be pushed, I did not need mollicoddling. I needed to be put on the edge of being kicked out all the time. Teachers know if you're going to pull a fast one, and all of that just comes from experience.

Last year, Tiffany opened five stores in the UAE – why do you think the brand is becoming so sought-after here? It's an exciting time at Tiffany with all of us working together to create the brand for the 21st century, so we're very much in the motion of going forward. And I think the Middle Eastern customer is into modernity, and a conversation about what is next. They're very well informed and they like to know what's cool. Women here have loved the collection because it's about design. It's about good design.