

Into the sand-Pitt

designs on Dubai

Since a Dubai-based luxury developer called on Brad Pitt as a design consultant, designers the world-over have gone up in arms. Why do they want to tell the Hollywood actor where to go? Interior designer Ramzi Makram-Ebeid lets us in on the answer...

You either have a designer's instinct or you don't. You can build on it through exposure and education, but you cannot develop it from nothing. A birth given foundation is needed. Plenty of working "designers" don't have this, and to the instinctual eye, it shows. On the other hand, you have amateurs, like Brad Pitt, who do have it, and, like the 44 year-old Hollywood star, some have the opportunity to use it even though they may not have the right "credentials". Designers barely tolerate amateurs, but it's the emergence of celebrity designers that's really getting under the skin of working designers. Why is that?

Being a trained designer, I've had to deal with my fair share of design divas that are made of more ego than water. Designers are not known for humility and just like actors, they love to see their names shine and glow in a big way. Having a super mega-star as competition, makes this narcissistic goal that much harder to achieve. After all, "Brad Pitt designs kiosk" is a catchier magazine header than "Non-Celebrity Re-Designs Paris." But, isn't competition a good thing?

It's not just that though. The guy is talented, and that's what really gets the claws out. "Brad Pitt Designs another Shithole" would not help increase any magazine's circulation for long. But, that's not what keeps him motivated, as he recently said: "Acting is my career; architecture is my passion." So much so that he is a self-taught designer, and along the way, he's been very keen on getting trained by friends



like Frank Gehry, through whom he learned CAD programming, and Graft, an L.A based firm, where he's a design consultant for an up-and-coming Zabeel Property 5 star eco-hotel. The man has even narrated a series about environmentally friendly architecture entitled "Design: E2" for public television.

On top of being a scene stealing talent, the multi-tasker gets people active and talking. Responding to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, Brad started Make It Right (www.makeitrightnola.org), a reconstruction organization focusing on the 9th Ward of New Orleans. Along with philanthropist Steve Bing (father of Liz Hurley's child), Pitt aimed to build 150 affordable sustainable homes using thirteen designs by thirteen prestigious architectural firms. Pitt further elevated his design credibility by collaborating with one of green designs biggest benchmarks, William McDonough & Partners, to use their Cradle-to-Cradle philosophies in selecting materials and designs for the homes. And, if that wasn't enough, he spearheaded the campaign

to raise money for the area, and (I'm getting a little nauseous now) committed five million of his own hard, well not easy, earned dollars.

Not many designers can pull that off, actually not many *people* can pull that off. Personally, I wish we had someone like Brad Pitt here in Egypt, we certainly need more people to start talking and doing something about design in this country. What we need, as one architect (Winy Maas) working with Make It Right said, is more "architectural Michael Moores." Only not so fat.