

ARCHITECTURE, DESIGN, INTERIORS + PROPERTY

identity[®]

ISSUE 264 / MAY 2026



New Generations

Milan Design Week Highlights / Spaces that Matter / Walls, Floors and Surfaces

identity.ae

A MOTIVATE PUBLICATION

DHS 25.00 OR 2.70 BD 2.60
SR 25.00 KD 2.10

6291100741137



Designing Through Disruption

identity brought together experts from the industry to discuss the ongoing geopolitical situation, its impact on the industry, and how to rise above it

WORDS – ANEESHA RAI



Above – (from left) Charul Punia, Assistant Sales Manager at GLAZE; Masoomah Hilal, Founder of Masoomah Hilal Design; Aleksandra Mojse of Moy Design Studio; Stuart Allen, Founder and CEO of Allen Architecture Interiors Design (AAID); and Amber Alston, Senior Associate at Bluehaus

In April, **identity** put together a panel at the GLAZE Granite and Marble showroom on Sheikh Zayed Road, Dubai to discuss the US-Iran conflict and its impact on the architecture and interior design sector. We discussed supply chain disruptions, rising material costs, client confidence, and how the community has remained resilient amidst uncertainty.

The panel comprised Charul Punia, Sales Manager at GLAZE; Masoomah Hilal, Founder of Masoomah Hilal Design; Aleksandra Mojse of Moy Design Studio; Stuart Allen, Founder and CEO of Allen Architecture Interiors Design AAID; and Amber Alston, Senior Associate at Bluehaus.

The discussion opened with a feeling of precocious optimism in the group. The news cycle is endless, and yet there is an undeniable undercurrent of confidence among those living in the UAE. The ability of this country to pivot, adapt, and rebound from challenges is quietly embedded in the culture; a shared focus on growth and reaching new heights that permeates throughout and is especially apparent in the design and construction industry.

While client approvals, changes in specifications, and delayed requests for proposals (RFPs) are common in the normal course of business, panellists observed that these were rising across the board. “There were a lot of unknowns to deal with at the beginning,” shared Allen. He added that one of the first things his firm did was to check in with their clients to share that the work would continue, albeit with some disruption.

Projects already in motion have continued, buoyed by clients who remain deeply financially and emotionally invested in their outcomes. This has been observed across sectors, from hospitality to development. “For us, it has been a very busy month, regardless of the situation,” shared Mojse. In construction, as we all well know, once a project begins, it rarely stops.

Instead, timelines stretch, expectations shift, and teams adapt. Punia shared, from a supplier perspective, that all GLAZE’s projects, which are primarily in the luxury segment, have continued. People do not invest in land and construction on a whim. Business owners and homeowners do not substitute marble for terrazzo based on speculation; investments at this scale are long term.

The real hesitation, it seems, lies not in execution but in initiation, with new projects and approvals beginning to slow as stakeholders take stock of an evolving landscape. The impact is most palpable in the supply chain. Longer lead times, logistical complexities, and fluctuating costs have introduced a new layer of decision making that demands agility. Hilal, who mainly focuses on residential design, shared that some of her clients were getting their furniture airfreighted.

Designers are increasingly turning to what is readily available: materials in stock, alternatives that maintain the integrity of the original vision, and local suppliers who can offer flexibility at speed. This has, in turn, placed a renewed emphasis

on local sourcing, with the UAE’s robust network of manufacturers and craftspeople stepping in. Punia shared that as the region’s largest stone supplier, GLAZE sees a responsibility to help stabilise the market using the tools available to them. This includes their in-house brands *NOBILITA*, a Made in Italy luxury porcelain line, and *KOZO* quartz and porcelain, which allow GLAZE to maintain consistent and cost-effective pricing.

Cost, inevitably, has entered the conversation with greater urgency. Clients, particularly in the residential segment as shared by Hilal, are scrutinising budgets more closely, prompting a more deliberate allocation of resources. What follows is a more considered approach by investing in key design moments while seeking efficiencies elsewhere. Amid these shifts, one constant has emerged as non-negotiable, as stated by Allen: communication.

Transparency has become the industry’s most valuable currency. Designers, architects, and suppliers alike are prioritising open dialogue by setting realistic expectations, flagging potential delays, and, crucially, resisting the temptation to overpromise.

Internally, firms are navigating a parallel challenge by supporting their teams through uncertainty. Flexibility has become the norm, with hybrid working models, adjusted expectations, and a greater emphasis on wellbeing shaping the day to day. All the panellists are now transitioning back to the office, stating that work itself has provided a sense of stability and comfort in providing a channel to focus amid the noise.

Interestingly, the current climate is not affecting all sectors equally. Hospitality, for instance, is seizing the moment, using quieter periods to push forward renovations. Commercial projects continue to be driven by ongoing investment and expansion. Residential, while steady in its existing pipeline, is beginning to show signs of caution when it comes to new commitments. It is a fragmented picture.

Looking ahead, strategies begin to diverge. Some see opportunities beyond the region, exploring international projects to diversify risk and expand their footprint. Others remain firmly rooted in the GCC, confident in the long-term trajectory and the strength of its recovery. One of the most striking takeaways is the sense of collective responsibility, as shared by Alston. In a highly competitive field, there is a growing recognition that short term gains won through unrealistic promises or aggressive undercutting can undermine the industry as a whole.

Instead, the call is for fairness, collaboration, and a commitment to maintaining standards. Suppliers are opening their doors, offering support, transparency, and alternatives; designers are leaning on one another; and a broader sense of community is taking hold.

If there is a defining mindset emerging from this moment, it is one of measured optimism: stay calm, stay adaptable, and take each day as it comes. If this moment has proven anything, it is that disruption, while inevitable, can also be transformative.