

Eklego's young duo nominated for dynamic designs

By Heba Elkayal
Daily News Egypt

This year's Emirates Glass LEAF Awards were said to be the most hotly contested competition since the inception of the award five years ago.

Recognizing architectural excellence in both residential and commercial sectors, the awards emphasize innovation of design, structural design and sustainable development.

Representing the best of Egypt's young talent are interior designer Hedayat Islam and architect Dina Khashaab, who run Eklego Design in Zamalek, Cairo.

Nominated in the Private Commercial Building of the Year category for their work on SODIC's new sales office, Islam was quick to point out the magnitude of such a nomination for Khashaab, the architect in this working partnership.

The sales office was her first architectural project, receiving a nomination soon after its completion.

The real estate company's sales office was a collaboration between SODIC, Basil Kamil of KCRG, who was responsible for site supervision, and the Eklego team. Working together, they created a space that best reflects the lifestyle SODIC is offering clients.

The company asked the duo for a facility that would highlight family living in a contemporary and vibrant setting with an emphasis on warmth and comfort. They wanted the space to reflect the "idea of living between indoor and outdoor spaces, a much intermixed notion where one could entertain and host events by using the versatile space for multiple needs," said Islam.

The vision for the office space evolved from the initial plans. The building was relocated three times, initially on a plot of land that was only 300 square meters, and intended to be an office space designed as a home. Today, it is spread over 2,000 square meters.

Much space was dedicated to children's play areas, highlighting how modern architecture can compliment the needs of families with young



SODIC's sales office is nominated for Private Commercial Building of the Year.

children. A niche wall is dedicated to a metal abstract sculpture of children's figures holding the hands of mothers or running.

In line with SODIC's vision, Khashaab designed a space that contained a sense of volume and light that filters in through large floor-to-ceiling sheets of glass. It is a source of pride for both to highlight the use of local resources and craftsmanship in all stages of production.

Eklego designed the interiors, including the color schemes, set ups and furniture used throughout the sales office," except for the office furniture," said Khashaab. Their efforts were concentrated on creating beautiful features such as mosaic floors and bathrooms that evoke a serene spa atmosphere. All of her furniture was produced locally and assembled in house as is all the furniture Eklego designs and sells in their own showroom.

"There isn't really good functional design in Egypt that's readily available," said Islam. This is the gap Eklego tapped into, carving a niche for itself in the market since 2005.

Eklego's work has a very definitive spirit. There is novelty in their plexiglass coffee table

that is imbedded with a patterned rug, or wood and glass dining table that has large Arabic calligraphy on the backs of chairs. Their identifying feature is a chicken or the egg question: Are they eclectic as a result of their originally Greek name or as a result of their style aptly named Eklego?

They leave room for much musings but their designs ultimately cater to the notion of practicality, affordability, function and form. Still, said Islam, their spirit is "forever evolving; it requires constant

innovation, using new materials and meeting new people. That's what it should be about experimentation."

Collaborating with KCRG proved to be highly productive, not only changing the perception of contemporary architecture in Egypt for many people but highlighting a new style for living well and living comfortably.

A more recent collaboration with Boukhara, a local print design studio, resulted in fabrics with Islamic geometric patterns. Islam and Khashaab

regard the cooperation as a vital learning experience and an opportunity to grow as designers.

Eklego's nomination is a foreshadowing of what's to come. On how the nomination for such a prestigious award would affect Eklego was modestly dismissed by Khashaab: "The response gives you international recognition. You start to network with people and you are more exposed internationally. It's nice to be placed on the map."



The space reflects the "idea of living between indoor and outdoor spaces."