

Shayirha — Share it.

Interview with Yousef Alshaikh

Shayirha: [shai-yer-ha] - verb: 1. Share it!

2. (Colloquial Kuwaiti) To fasten with a hook.

Think tanks are overrated. All you need is a group of students, snacks and time. Voila, ideas are born. Sure, some of them might not always be feasible -- “Human-sized hamster wheels/electric generators” -- but every so often, you have a winner. Take for example a group of architecture students from King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM). As many before them, they realized that higher education is not just about reading textbooks and attending classes; it’s about seeking knowledge that is personal to yourself and sharing it with your peers.

Thus out of this simple idea, Shayirha was born.

A group of ‘Mshayireen’ (sharers) meets up weekly to present and share their design ideas. The themes of the meetings range from presentation skills and techniques, to full-on case studies. The group is a non-profit organization whose sole mission stems from the passion of the group members to ‘share’. Shayirha was co-founded by Eyad Maghazil, Ala Al-Mctoom, and Yousef Alshaikh. Meanwhile, the list of coordinators, participants and members is constantly growing.

To get a better idea of the group, we hunted down and spoke to one of the founders of the group, Yousef Alshaikh.

Explain the concept behind Shayirha?

The idea in its infancy had been floating around in our collective minds for a while when one day, by divine intervention and sheer hunger after a long day at university, we ended up at Al-Khobar seafront in the company of three pizzas and a piece of A4 sized paper. Hence was born the first draft for our yet unnamed project. Several months of long sleepless nights and many pizzas later we arrived at a simple premise that is very much at the heart of Shayirah:

“We love design, and want to share it with the rest of humanity!”

Unfortunately, humanity was out that day, so we decided to start small and local with our university, KFUPM. Now that I’ve sidetracked to my heart’s content, I’ll go ahead and explain our simple concept:

We are three architecture students with a variety of different skill sets and design knowledge. We are not unique as such, as we are part of a college that is full of designers that are similar to us in these two matters. This led us nat-

urally to the notion that everyone would stand to benefit if we were to share these two things amongst ourselves and the rest of the college. So, we sat down and structured the project, wrote a preliminary list of interests (a manifesto of sorts), started to spread the news, printed a few flyers, and scheduled our first meeting on the 9th of March 2009. This “pilot” meeting, which would be a demo for things to come, was a huge success with our colleagues and things just picked up from there. Thus, Shayirha, which is an Arabic take on “share it”, was born.

The official format that was established was a collaborative weekly meeting every Monday after university hours where we would meet, someone would present an idea, design approach, etc., and we would sit and discuss it for an hour. In addition to our discussions there would be other activities such as designing, viewing selected design works, and let’s not forget lots of delicious munching.

I’d also like to point out that everything we do at Shayirha is a group effort, from the filming, to the discussions, to the preparation of content. I can go on forever just talking about the people who have put this together, but I’d rather just say that everyone who’s pitched in so far is someone who breathes design day in and day out.

And that, my friend, is Shayirha in a “nutshell”!

Why did you take it upon yourselves to create Shayirha?

We waited, waited, and waited some more. Since no one else was doing it for us, we decided we might as well do it ourselves. That, and divine intervention, of course.

Are there any rules for joining Shayirha?

Our three simple rules are: 1) you genuinely have to “love” design. It might seem so, but we’re not really here for the pizza. 2) You have to discuss and debate, so no boring lectures please. 3) Finally, anything and everything design-related counts. Underwater glowing fashion? Yes, please.

What has been your favorite project or event that you’ve organized so far?

So far, the “make a chair out of cardboard” project has been our most fun project. If you haven’t watched the video of it yet, allow me to preface it by saying: The video was not doctored. The chair really did support a whole busload of students!

You’ve opted to document Shayirha via blog, video and random events in Dhahran. What is the purpose of each outlet?

Our weekly meetings in our studio area at KFUPM are the very heart of the project. The blog on the other hand is a means to collect all our ideas, projects and knowledge in one place and provide a platform for the access of all this material, in addition to the video documentation of all our meetings, to our members and rest of the world alike.

In your videos, the cameraman always seems to be running, why is that?

Ah, that would be Ala'a Al-Mctoom, funny guy, always late. No, but seriously, Ala'a is our very own home-bred director and cinematographer, and he really loves doing those funky intros which really help support our "design should be fun too" attitude.

How does Shayirha relate to the everyday student in Saudi Arabia or even the Arab world?

Ever since inception, we've really worked hard to make Shayirha as open to the public and accessible as possible. So far we've even managed to gather a decent following of non-design discipline students here at KFUPM in addition to design students from around the country. We are very proud of them and will be collaborating with them on numerous projects at the peripheries of the design field, such as robotics design and interactive art.

During these past few years, the new Saudi generation has been getting a lot of bad press regarding lack of enthusiasm, work ethics and so on. Have you seen a different image now that you are all involved in a project such as Shayirha?

From experience I would say bad press is just that, "bad" press. As a country we have legions of people with amazing forward-thinking ideas and the will that is necessary to go through with these ideas. I believe that with the collaboration of others and the right exposure, such people will God willing inspire the rest of us to start taking initiatives in serving our society with the things we love doing the most.

What is your future plan for Shayirha? Will you take over the world?

Huh? Who's been talking to you guys? All I can say though is that we'll be sharing our little project with a much larger audience very soon! With that said, I would like to leave you all with the following thought: Everyone you know is a light bulb waiting to burst into a thousand Kelvin. Share and all shall be light!

Shayirha might still be a young group, but based on its rate of progress and the dedication of its members, Shayirha is well on its way to becoming a pioneer of innovative learning.

www.shayirha.com



Shayirha ©

