

Egyptian Folk Identity as a Source of Creativity in Designing Multifunctional Furniture

Dr. Dina Ahmed Mohamed Mostafa

Interior design and furniture program- Faculty of Design and creative arts - Ahrum
Canadian university- Giza
di.a.m.mostafa@gmail.com

Abstract

Multi-functional (multi-purpose) furniture design has a special characteristic, as it is formed as a result of a creative process carried out by the designer in shadow of intellectual capabilities and multiple experiences in the field of specialization. Egyptian civilization, especially its popular identity, has a rich artistic heritage. The Egyptian artist's creativity has manifested itself in various aspects of life, especially the arts. Civilization has the characteristic of renewal and development whether it is in progress or weakness, and the extent of individuals' awareness of their preservation of their cultural identity is measured. There is no doubt that identity expresses the absolute truth of a thing, which includes its essential characteristics that distinguish it from others.

The research focuses on engaging contemporary technological sciences to spread community development. The Egyptian folk heritage has many artistic and constructive elements through which the designer can adapt them to create multi-purpose furniture designs bearing our Egyptian characteristics to emphasize our authentic Egyptian folk identity and to add a creative and aesthetic touch that gives a special character to the furniture pieces.

Keywords

Egyptian identity, multi-purpose, creativity, Egyptian folk art, revival

الملخص

يتمتع تصميم الأثاث متعدد الأغراض بمكانة وطابع خاص، حيث يتكون نتيجة عملية إبداعية قام بها المصمم في ظل قدرات فكرية ولتجارب متعددة في مجال التخصص. فالأثاث عامة هو العنصر الملازم للعمارة ومن أهم عناصر التصميم الداخلي، ويعتمد تصميم الأثاث على الفراغ الذي سيوضع في. ونتيجة للتغيرات التكنولوجية المتعددة والإحتياجات المستقبلية الحالية للمجتمع والظروف التي تواجهنا من أجل إيجاد بيئة أفضل، فظهر الأثاث متعدد الوظائف ليلبي الإحتياجات المستقبلية للمجتمع، وذلك من أجل أن يحقق أكثر من استخدام داخل المساحات السكنية، والتي أصبحت في وقتنا الحالي تتسم بالمساحات المحدودة في ظل النمو السكاني. الى جانب المبدأ الوظيفي و إيجاد الأشكال الملائمة وظيفيا والمتناسقة مع طبيعة جسم الإنسان من خلال تشكيلات بصرية تحكمها قيم فنية وجمالية لتضفي على الأثاث متعدد الأغراض طابع خاص بها. تتمتع الحضارة المصرية وخاصة ذات الهوية الشعبية بموروثها الفني الغني، فقد تجلت إبداعات الفنان المصري في شتى نواحي الحياة وخاصة الفنون. وللحضارة خاصية التجدد والتطور في مسار التقدم أو الضعف، ويقاس مدى وعى الأفراد بحفاظهم على هويتهم الثقافية. ولاشك أن الهوية تعبر عن حقيقة الشئ المطلقة والتي تشمل صفاته الجوهرية التي تميزه عن غيره. ترجع أهمية البحث في الإنخراط في علوم التكنولوجيا المعاصرة لنشر تنمية المجتمع. ويتمتع الموروث الشعبي المصري بالعديد من العناصر الفنية والبنائية التي يستطيع من خلالها المصمم تطويعها في إبتكار تصميمات أثاث متعدد

الأغراض يحمل سماتنا المصرية للتأكيد على هويتنا الشعبية المصرية الأصيلة ولإضفاء لمسة إبداعية جمالية تضيف طابعا خاصا على المكان.

الكلمات المفتاحية

الهوية المصرية، متعدد الأغراض، الإبداع، الفن الشعبي المصري، الإحياء

Research problem

How can the rich artistic heritage of Egyptian folk identity be effectively integrated into the design of modern multifunctional furniture to meet contemporary space-saving requirements, while maintaining cultural authenticity and sustainability?

Research objective

Folk Egyptian Identity:

"This research explores how folk Egyptian identity can inspire multifunctional furniture design, blending cultural symbolism with modern functionality."

- Philosophical Vision of Identity:

"It analyzes the philosophical concept of identity in furniture design, balancing cultural heritage with contemporary practical needs."

Research Importance

This research lies in its exploration of how Egyptian folk identity can serve as a creative source for designing multifunctional furniture, offering a unique fusion of cultural heritage and contemporary design principles that addresses the growing need for space-efficient and sustainable solutions in modern living environments.

Research methodology

Conducting a descriptive analytical study of one of the models that express the folk Egyptian identity (inspired from the Nubian Culture).

Research procedures

- Analysis of folk Egyptian art symbols.
- Cultural significance of folk Egyptian symbols.
- Contemporary multi-functional furniture models inspired by folk Egyptian symbols.

Introduction

Multi-functional (multi-purpose) furniture design has a special features and characteristics, as it is formed as a result of a creative process carried out by the designer in shadow of intellectual capabilities and multiple experiences in the field of specialization. Furniture in general is the inherent element of architecture and one of the most important elements of interior design, and the design of the furniture depends on the space in which it will be placed. As a result of the

multiple technological changes, the current future needs of society, and the circumstances facing us in order to create a better environment, multi-functional furniture has emerged to meet the future needs of society, in order to achieve more than one use within residential spaces, which in our current time have become characterized by limited spaces in shadow of population growth. In addition to the functional principle and finding functionally appropriate shapes that are compatible with the nature of the human body through visual formations governed by artistic and aesthetic values to give multi-purpose furniture a character of its own. Egyptian civilization, especially its popular identity, has a rich artistic heritage. The Egyptian artist's creativity has manifested itself in various aspects of life, especially the arts. Civilization has the characteristic of renewal and development whether it is in progress or weakness, and the extent of individuals' awareness of their preservation of their cultural identity is measured. There is no doubt that identity expresses the absolute truth of a thing, which includes its essential characteristics that distinguish it from others.

The Egyptian civilization is rich in its artistic heritage, as it is the harvest of the Egyptian artist with his artistic sense and his tireless pursuit of learning and discovering new things. The creativity of the Egyptian artist was manifested in various aspects of life, especially the arts, such as sculpture, jewelry, metals, pottery and furniture. Civilization is a self-developed culture, and civilization has the characteristic of renewal and development in the path of progress or weakness. Every nation maintains its civilization as long as its culture, as culture leads civilization and determines its path, and the effort to consolidate and spread culture among the people remains, and the extent of individuals' awareness is measured by their preservation of their cultural identity and engagement in contemporary technological sciences to spread the development of society. Our cultural heritage enjoys many artistic and structural elements through which the designer can adapt them to create modern contemporary multi-functional furniture designs, bearing our folk Egyptian characteristics, thus emphasizing our authentic Egyptian identity. Identity expresses the absolute truth of a thing that includes its essential qualities and distinguishes it from others. Every group has a set of social, living and historical characteristics and features that express this entity in which people are similar due to the influence of the characteristics and features that unite them. From this, the individual derives his sense of identity and belonging. Although the concept of identity is based on stability, many factors may affect it as a result of the transformation of historical and social conditions. History confirms the existence of civilizations that dominated the world and then disappeared, but the matter depends on the efforts of the people of the culture in establishing and spreading their culture and spreading development in society.

Egyptian folk identity, with its rich cultural heritage and vibrant artistic traditions represented in the material culture, which offers a unique and inspiring source of creativity for designing multifunctional furniture. The material culture of the physical aspects of science traditions is for all cultural products inherited from parents and grandparents includes documentations practices, tools, materials, methods and phases of the various work and the diversity of production and use in the life cycle of the individual and society. Material culture includes:

1. Crafts and folk arts such as (carpentry, blacksmithing, pottery ...).
2. Popular building included (habitant, religious and servant ship architecture) .
3. Knitting, sewing and clothing including (embroidery, mats, carpets).

Research terms

Identity:

Identity is defined as the true essence of a thing that includes its essential qualities that distinguish it from others. The identity of a nation is the essential element in the features of its history that distinguish its civilization and create a character that distinguishes its people from others. (Muhammad Hassan, p. 121). Some have linked identity and traditions, and they have argued that traditions play a major role in creating a specific framework that expresses identity. The most important elements that define the identity of society, is that it expresses continuity over time without being affected by the surrounding environmental variables and the idea of uniqueness that provides limits for the thing.

- Heritage

It is the cultural, intellectual, religious, literary and artistic legacy. Heritage is considered one of the determinants in forming the identity of society, because it is a record of the culture of society and the unity of its approach and its human features and idea across the ages.

- Culture

It includes and refers to all means, behavior, customs, knowledge, art, language, thought, philosophy, work, perception, rules, customs, traditions, and all systems related to thinking and knowledge. (Dalal Yousrallah, p. 6). Culture is divided into two basic elements, which are material and immaterial culture. In immaterial culture, it is represented in intangible features such as values and standards that are the fixed reference for culture, and material culture is represented in the things that man made to express his needs that change in relation to the surrounding environment, such as architectural elements such as buildings, houses, and facilities.

In addition to all mentioned previously; multifunctional furniture refers to pieces designed to serve more than one purpose, making them ideal for small spaces or for maximizing utility in any home. These pieces can adapt to various needs, combining functions like storage, seating, sleeping, and workspaces in a single item.

1- Types of Multifunctional furniture

1/1 ****Sofa Beds****: Couches that can be converted into beds, perfect for small apartments or guest rooms (example picture 1).

1/2 ****Storage Ottomans****: Ottomans that open up to reveal storage space inside, doubling as both a footrest and a place to store items (example picture 2).

1/3 ****Murphy Beds****: Beds that fold up into a wall or cabinet, freeing up floor space during the day (example picture 3).

1/4 ****Extendable Tables****: Dining or coffee tables that can be expanded or adjusted in size, providing more surface area when needed (example picture 4).

1/5 ****Modular Furniture****: Pieces that can be reconfigured in various ways, such as sectional sofas that can be rearranged or stacked storage units (example picture 5).

1/6 ****Foldable Desks and Tables****: Desks or tables that can be folded down to save space when not in use (example picture 6).

1/7 ****Bed with Storage****: Beds that include built-in drawers or shelves underneath for extra storage (example picture 7).

1/8 ****Convertible Chairs****: Chairs that can be transformed into a bed or chaise lounge (example picture 8).



Pic. (1): Multifunctional sofa beds.

<https://spsfurniture.com/products/2021-new-design-multifunction-sofa-bed-with-folding-armrest-table>



Pic. (2): Storage Ottomans sample.

<https://www.walmart.com/ip/Era-Indoor-Upholstered-Boucle-Fabric-White-Tray-Top-Storage-Ottoman-for-Living-Room-by-Furniture-of-America/5515993244>



Pic. (3): Murphy Bed sample

<https://www.bobvila.com/slideshow/murphy-beds-9-hide-away-sleepers-8431/>



Pic. (4): Extendable Table

<https://www.amazon.com/UFINEGO-Folding-Extendable-118-50inch-Console/dp/B0C33ZSLXV>



Pic. (5): Modular Furniture that provides multifunctional furniture e pieces.

<https://www.designboom.com/design/james-howlett-restyle/>



Pic.(6): Foldable Desks and Tables

<https://www.amazon.co.jp/-/en/Folding-Mounted-Expandable-Multifunctional-Apartment/dp/B0B1W8WG99>



Pic. (7): Bed with Storage sample.

<https://www.cgtrader.com/3d-models/interior/bedroom/modern-bed-with-storage-multifunctional-bed>



Pic. (8): Convertible Chair sample.

<https://www.amazon.com/STRPRETTY-BASIC-Convertible-Adjustable-Multi-Functional/dp/B0CLNN7KY8>

These types of furniture are especially popular in urban environments where space is at a premium, but they can be useful in any setting to enhance functionality and efficiency.

2- Analytical Case Study: The Nubian-Inspired Modular Sofa Set

2/1 Background:

This design draws inspiration from **Nubian folk art**, a rich cultural tradition in southern Egypt. Nubian houses are known for their **vivid colors**, **geometric patterns**, and **natural materials**, which are used to create a strong sense of identity (example; pictures 9-12).



Pic. (9): Living space inside a Nubian house using pointed arch for windows and entrance decorated with geometric patterns.

<https://medium.com/@abodoniakar am777/latest-articles-e0bcb2c0d06>



Pic. (10): Façade of a Nubian house.

<https://www.egiptoexclusivo.com/en/upper-egypt/nubia/>



Pic. (11): Wall painting with vibrant colors covering the Nubian house façade.

<https://www.ask-aladdin.com/all-destinations/egypt/category/egypt-site-guide/page/nubian-sites>



Pic. (12): Wall painting on a Nubian house.

<https://travelertina.blog/2024/04/11/how-much-do-you-know-about-nubia/>

2/2 Design Features

2/2-1 Modular Design: The sofa is made up of several modular pieces that can be rearranged into different configurations—sofa, lounge, or even a guest bed. The flexibility allows it to serve multiple purposes in limited space, ideal for urban apartments.

2/2-2 Folk Motif Application: The sofa incorporates **Nubian patterns** through embroidery on cushions and upholstery. Geometric shapes such as triangles and diamonds, which are common in Nubian wall paintings, are used on the fabric in neutral earth tones like ochre, sand, and terracotta.

2/2-3 Materials: The frame is crafted from sustainable wood, commonly used in traditional Nubian homes. The use of wood with woven straw accents gives the furniture a distinctly **organic and earthy feel**.

2/2-4 Cultural Aesthetic: By referencing the color palette and patterns of Nubian architecture, the sofa set not only serves a functional purpose but also connects the user to a specific cultural heritage, making it both practical and emotionally engaging.

2/3 Impact:

2/3-1 Cultural Relevance: This sofa set enhances the cultural atmosphere of modern homes while preserving the essence of traditional Nubian folk art. It serves as a conversation starter and a piece of cultural expression.

2/3-2 Functionality: Its modular nature ensures that the piece can adapt to different living situations, offering a bed, lounge, and seating area all in one.

2/3-3 Market Appeal: By combining traditional aesthetics with modern modularity, the piece appeals to a wide audience, including those interested in both contemporary design and cultural preservation.

3- Concept Development for Nubian-Inspired Modular Sofa Set

3/1 Design Philosophy:

The modular sofa draws inspiration from **Nubian culture**, particularly the architectural and artistic traditions of **Nubian villages**. Nubian homes are known for their vibrant **geometric patterns** and earthy tones, which will serve as a primary design influence.

The core idea is to create a **modular sofa** that can be reconfigured in multiple ways (as a lounge, sofa, or guest bed), all while reflecting **Nubian heritage** through its aesthetics.

3/2 Key Design Elements:

3/2-1 Modularity & Functionality:

- The sofa will have several **detachable segments** that can be rearranged into different configurations, making it suitable for smaller urban spaces where versatility is the key.
- **Modules** will include standard seating units, ottomans, and a chaise lounge that can double as a bed when combined.

3/2-2 Nubian Geometric Motifs:

- The **upholstery** will feature traditional Nubian patterns, including **triangles, diamonds, and zigzags** that are often seen in **Nubian wall paintings**.
- Patterns will be **embroidered** or woven into the fabric, using colors typical of Nubian art, like **deep red, ochre, sand, and terracotta**.

3/2-3 Color Palette:

- Earth tones will dominate the sofa, with **warm neutrals** like beige and tan used for the base fabric, while **vibrant reds, oranges, and blacks** are featured in the geometric motifs.
- The color scheme reflects the warm desert landscape of **Nubia**, giving the furniture a grounded, natural feel.

3/2-4 Natural Materials:

- The frame will be crafted from **sustainable wood**, such as **reclaimed cedar** or **bamboo**, echoing the **organic materials** used in Nubian architecture.
- **Textiles** will be made from **organic cotton** or **linen**, with handwoven accents that reference Nubian craftsmanship.
- Accents like **woven straw**, often used in Nubian crafts, can be used to reinforce the armrests or backrests for a textured, artisanal touch.

3/3 Functional Features:

3/3-1 Storage Options:

- Some of the modules will have **hidden storage compartments** under the seat cushions, perfect for stowing away blankets, pillows, or household items.

3/3-2 Adjustable Backrests:

- The backrest of the sofa could be adjustable or collapsible, allowing it to convert easily into a lounge or flatbed configuration.

3/3-3 Sustainability:

- Emphasis will be placed on **eco-friendly materials** such as sustainable woods, natural fibers, and low-VOC finishes.
- The modularity of the design also promotes longevity, as individual components can be replaced or reconfigured rather than the entire piece being discarded.

3/4 Cultural Significance:

3/4-1 Preserving Nubian Identity:

- By using Nubian-inspired motifs and materials, the sofa will be more than just a functional piece; it will be a **cultural artifact**, preserving **Nubian artistic traditions** in a modern context.

3/4-2 Handcrafted Elements:

- Certain details, such as the embroidered patterns or woven accents, will be **handmade** by local artisans, further connecting the design to **authentic Egyptian craftsmanship**.

3/5 Target Audience:

3/5-1 Urban Dwellers:

- This piece would be perfect for people living in **small apartments** or homes where space-saving furniture is essential.

3/5-2 Culturally Minded Consumers:

- Those with a love for **culturally significant, artisanal** products will appreciate the craftsmanship and history embedded in the design.

3/5-3 Sustainability-Conscious Consumers:

- Consumers looking for **eco-friendly furniture** will find appeal in the use of natural, sustainable materials and thoughtful design that supports both functionality and environmental responsibility.

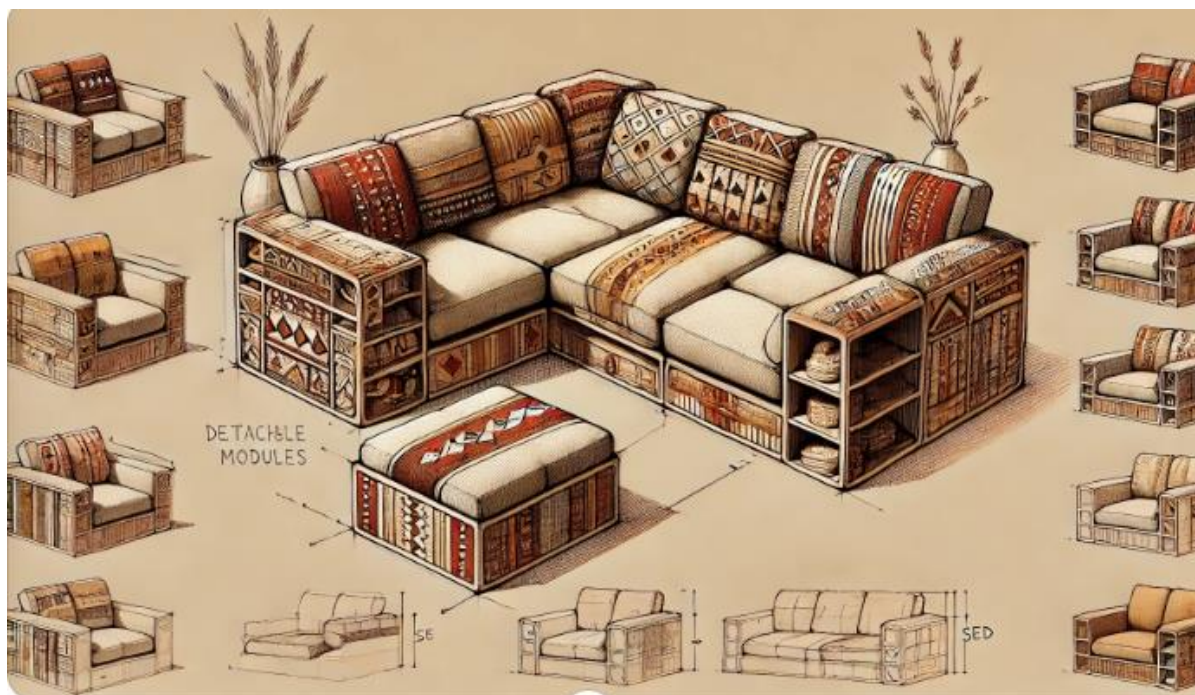
3/6 Potential Market Appeal:

3/6-1 Local Market:

- This design will appeal to the Egyptian market, particularly those who value cultural preservation and have a contemporary sense of style.

3/6-2 Global Market:

- The modular sofa can have global appeal by blending **traditional Nubian elements** with **modern minimalist design**, making it attractive to an international audience interested in global influences in furniture design.



Pic. (13): Detailed sketch of the Nubian-inspired modular sofa set. It showcases the various modular configurations, Nubian folk motifs, and the earthy color palette with bold geometric patterns. The design also includes sustainable wooden frames and woven straw accents, along with hidden storage compartments. (Designed using AI by Author).

3/7 Visualization of the Sofa Set:

3/7-1 Base Structure: Example, picture 13

- Wooden frame with interchangeable cushion modules that come in varying sizes (seat, backrest, ottoman).

3/7-2 Patterns & Motifs:

- Upholstery features Nubian-inspired embroidery in bold geometrical shapes, perhaps on accent pillows or select seating areas.

3/7-3 Multifunctionality:

- Individual sections of the sofa can be rearranged based on need: Forming an L-shape for a corner seat, a larger lounging area, or a flat surface for resting.

3/7-4 Storage:

- Discreet storage compartments beneath certain sections, seamlessly blending functionality with aesthetics.

4- ****Incorporating Traditional Motifs****

4/1 ****Patterns and Symbols****: Egyptian folk art is full of intricate patterns, geometric designs, and symbolic motifs (example picture 15), such as the floral patterns, the eye, and pilgrimage imagery. These elements can be integrated into furniture through carvings, inlays, or textile patterns.

4/2 ****Color Schemes****: The vibrant colors commonly used in Egyptian folk crafts—such as deep reds, blues, golds, and earthy tones— (example picture 14) can be applied to furniture to create visually striking pieces that evoke a sense of cultural pride.



Pic. (14): Traditional Nubian Egyptian rug with the vibrant colors commonly used. https://www.freepik.com/premium-vector/nubian-egyptian-rug-cultural-drawing-art-colors_49632773.htm



Pic. (15): Traditional Sofa (Nawraj) made from local wood. (photographed by Author)

5- ****Use of Local Materials****

5/1 ****Natural Resources****: Traditional Egyptian materials like palm wood, reeds, and cotton can be used in the construction of multifunctional furniture. These materials not only connect the design to the land but also promote sustainability (example picture 16).

5/2 ****Textiles****: Egyptian textiles, such as handwoven rugs or tapestries, can be incorporated into furniture design, providing both aesthetic values and functional uses, like cushions or upholstery (example picture 17).



Pic. (16): Handcrafted basket made of palm fronds. (photographed by Author)

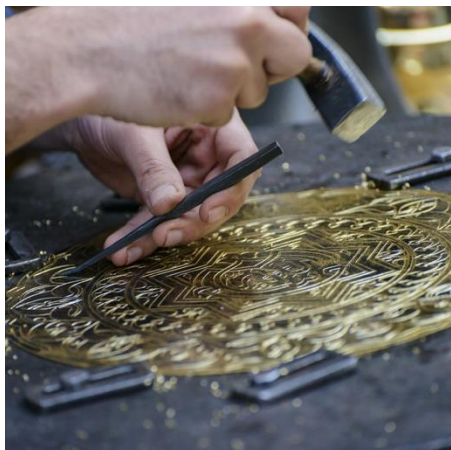


Pic. (17): Handmade carpet inspired with the folk Egyptian art patterns. (photographed by Author)

6- ****Folk Techniques and Craftsmanship****

6/1 ****Handcrafted Elements****: Emphasizing traditional Egyptian craftsmanship, such as hand-carving or weaving, can add unique, artisanal touches to multifunctional furniture, making each piece distinct and culturally resonant (example, picture 18 – 19).

6/2 ****Modular Craft Forms****: Many traditional Egyptian crafts, like basket weaving or tent-making, can be reimagined into modular or multifunctional forms, allowing for flexibility and versatility in modern furniture design (example, picture 16).



Pic. (18): Knocking on copper plates with Folk Egyptian patterns, considered one of the unique Egyptian handcrafts. (photographed by Author)



Pic. (19): Traditional method of preparing the palm fronds to create traditional Egyptian boxes. (photographed by Author)

7- ****Narrative and Storytelling****

7/1 ****Cultural Stories****: Multifunctional furniture can tell a story through its design, incorporating elements that reflect myths, historical events, or daily life in Egyptian culture. For example, a foldable table could be adorned with scenes from the Nile, depicting the flow of life and its transformations (example picture 20).

7/2 ****Symbolic Functionality****: The multifunctionality itself can be symbolic—like a piece that transforms from a storage unit to a seating area, representing the adaptability and resourcefulness that are hallmarks of Egyptian folk life (example picture 21).



Pic. (20): Multifunctional coffee table designed with inspiration of Egyptian folk cultural stories. (designed using AI by the Author)



Pic. (21): Multifunctional stool designed with inspiration to symbolic functionality, inspired with Egyptian folk patterns. (designed using AI by the Author)

8- **Modern Interpretations of Folk Identity**

8/1 ****Contemporary Fusion****: Designers can blend traditional Egyptian motifs with modern, minimalist aesthetics to create multifunctional furniture that appeals to both local and global markets. These fusion respects the past while embracing modern needs (example picture 22 – 23).

8/2 ****Urban Contexts****: Multifunctional furniture inspired by Egyptian folk identity can be particularly impactful in urban settings, where space is limited but the desire for cultural expression remains strong.



Pic. (22): Minimalistic multi varied tables inspired from Egyptian folk patterns. (designed using AI by the Author)



Pic. (23): Multifunctional stool used in both seating and storage. (designed by the Author)

9- ****Community and Cultural Sustainability****

9/1 ****Empowering Local Artisans****: Designing multifunctional furniture based on Egyptian folk identity can support and revitalize traditional crafts, providing economic opportunities for local artisans.

9/2 ****Cultural Preservation****: By embedding cultural elements into everyday objects, multifunctional furniture can play a role in preserving and promoting Egyptian cultural heritage in a rapidly modernizing world.

In conclusion, Egyptian folk identity offers a rich tapestry of inspiration for creating multifunctional furniture that is both beautiful and functional. By blending traditional aesthetics, such furniture can serve as a bridge between the past and the present, enhancing living spaces while celebrating cultural heritage.

Results

- 1- Folk Egyptian symbols, patterns, and motifs are key sources of creativity and intellectual enrichment in furniture design, analyzed and reformulated for contemporary applications.
- 2- Interior designers play a crucial role in preserving Egyptian identity and countering intellectual alienation.
- 3- Reviving Egyptian identity in design has often relied on direct imitation of ancient forms, but it should embrace abstract, contemporary interpretations.
- 4- The importance of folk Egyptian identity lies in its reflection of cultural and intellectual values in furniture design.

Recommendations

- 1- Share the results with relevant ministries, colleges, professors, and designers.
- 2- Encourage interior design students to embrace Egyptian identity in multifunctional furniture design.

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