

## Jo Davies

The Twist pendants were among a range of handcrafted ceramic items including bowls, cups, lighting and decorative pieces



## Aline Johnson

The glass design studio's bespoke, handmade chandeliers and lighting items have the potential to become dramatic statement pieces



## Susannah Hunter

Her leather appliqué pouffes, screens, armchairs and other furnishings are extensions of her handbag range, which has taken the UAE by storm

The best of up-and-coming British talent was showcased by Barjis Creativz at Interiors UAE 2011. Selina Denman met the company's founder, Barjis Chohan

Barjis Chohan has a self-confessed "passion for fashion". She obtained an MA in design from London's Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in 1998 and went on to do an internship with Vivienne Westwood. Along the way, however, she realised that her priorities lay elsewhere.

"I realised that with fashion you have to work 24 hours a day, seven days a week. At that point in time I wanted to settle down and start a family and I just thought that it wouldn't be feasible to go into the fashion industry."

Instead, she launched Barjis, an award-winning rug company and interior design firm, Barjis Creativz, an agency that promotes British design talent in international markets, and, most recently, her own line of designer abayas. All while bringing up her three daughters, now aged 12, eight and five.

"I was pregnant and I started painting. At some point I thought, 'That would look nice on the floor.' That's how the rug business started out. It came from very humble beginnings. Initially it was just word of mouth. Then we set up a website and started doing a couple of shows and gradually it grew," says the British Asian entrepreneur.

In fact, it grew so impressively that Barjis was named Entrepreneur of the Year in London and Most Internationally Aware Entrepreneur of the Year by Shell Livewire in 2001, Designer in International Trade by the *Financial Mail* on Sunday in 2002, and first runner-up for Female Owned Business of the Year by UK Trade and Investment in 2004.

The rugs are highly contemporary, custom-made and "bridge the gap between art and design", she says. It's a formula that seems to strike a chord in the UAE – on her first official visit to Dubai, Barjis earned a commission for Jumeirah Emirates Towers hotel and has since worked on a number of residential projects across the country.

"Being here, I realised that people liked my work but were also looking for new and interesting ideas from the UK market. That's how I came up with the idea of introducing fresh new talent in the UAE."

From this idea came a whole new offshoot of the Barjis brand. Barjis Creativz is dedicated to nurturing



Barjis Chohan promotes British design talent in international markets.

young British talent and helping up-and-coming designers find their footing in foreign markets. "I see myself not just as a designer but as an entrepreneur. I don't believe that you have to do one thing for the rest of your life. I'm driven more by challenge than money, I would say. I love doing rugs but representing other designers feels like I'm giving something back to society."

The problem with young designers, says Barjis, is they have great ideas but often lack the business acumen to back them up. Design colleges often fail to teach their graduates the tools they need to turn concepts into commercial successes. "That's where Barjis Creativz comes in. Because we've got extensive knowledge of various markets, we can mentor and groom young designers so they are successful as business people. This was a real gap in the UK market."

The recent Interiors UAE exhibition presented an ideal platform for Barjis to introduce a host of budding British designers to the Emirati market. The British Design Pavilion by Barjis Creativz offered an interesting, intelligent mix of high-end contemporary design.

Participants included Qian Wang, another Central Saint Martins graduate who has developed an eco-friendly textile that can be used as a two- or three-dimensional wallcovering, and

## where to find it

### Artwood

www.artwood-floors.com

### MacMaster

www.macmasterdesign.com

### Susannah Hunter

www.susannahhunter.com

### Solomon & Wu

www.solomonandwu.com

### Aline Johnson Glass Design

www.alinejohnson.co.uk

### Zita Menyhart Studio

www.zitamenyhart.com

### Jo Davies

www.jo-davies.com

### Barjis Creativz

www.barjiscreativz.com

Jo Davies, who showcased a range of handcrafted ceramic items including bowls, cups, lighting and decorative pieces. The Twist pendants made a particular impression.

The Zita Menyhart Studio presented the charming and ever-so-practical Una, a three-piece fibreglass set that consists of a low coffee table, two seats and an inbuilt ice bucket. When not in use, the chairs slide in under the table to create a highly compact, sculptural, space-saving unit. Aline Johnson Glass Design showed its bespoke, handmade statement chandeliers and lighting items, while Solomon & Wu introduced its contemporary architectural mouldings.

"I've taken traditional moulding formats, cornices, skirting, archi-

traves and ceiling roses, and applied contemporary design to them," says Jake Solomon, the director of Solomon & Wu. "We are trying to make mouldings relevant again, so we looked for shapes that are in use in architecture right now."

Susannah Hunter presented her leather appliqué furnishings, an extension of her handbag range, which has taken the UAE by storm since making its debut in Dubai's O'de Rose boutique in March.

Alex MacMaster showcased his award-winning, wood-based lighting and furniture products, and Artwood offered plenty of reasons to reconsider how we treat our floors.

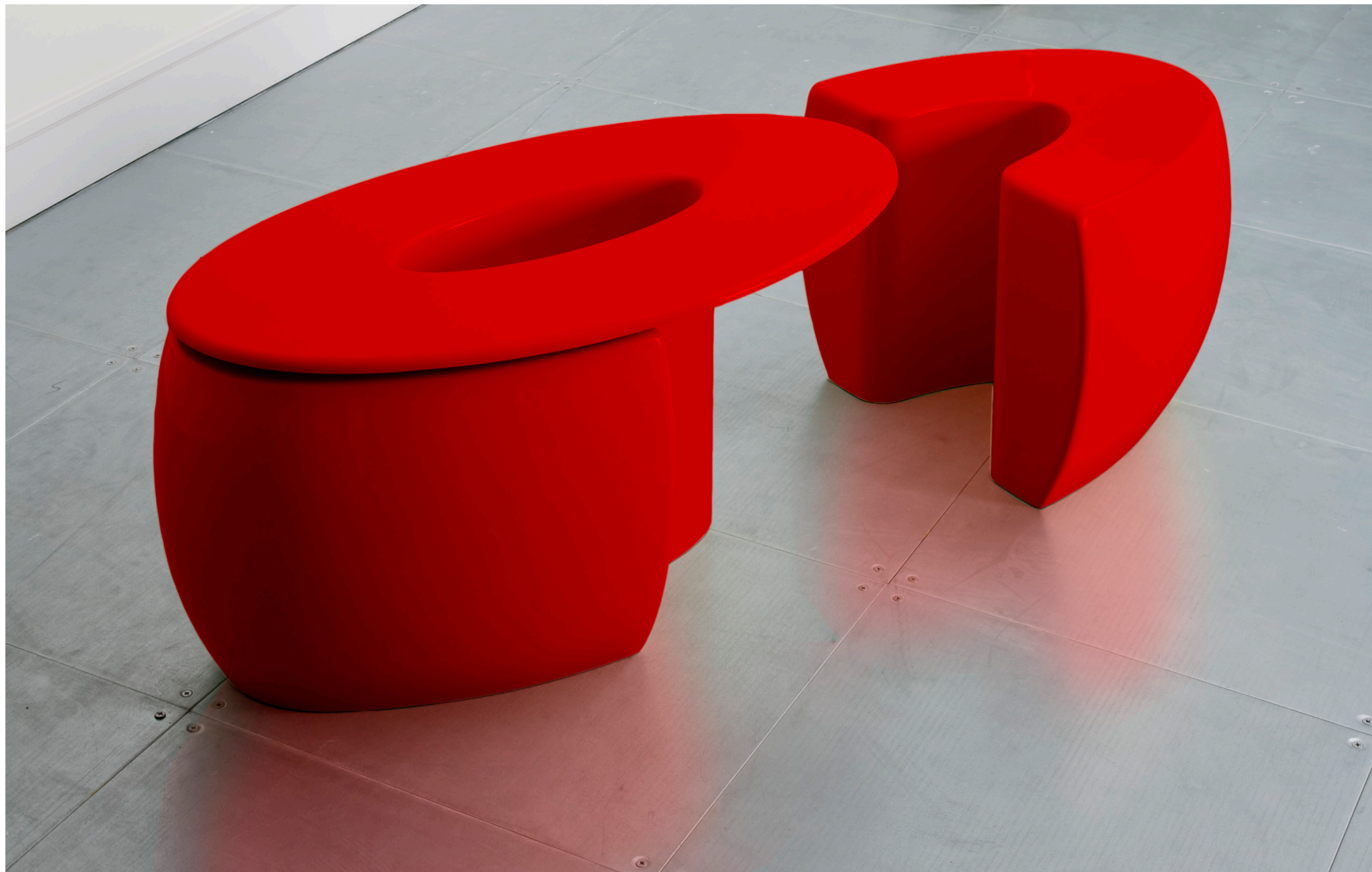
"We are a family-run company that creates some of the best hand-finished timber floors on the market. Timber flooring, especially in UK markets, is very dated; there is very little in terms of progressive design. What we are trying to offer is a piece of art on the floor, rather than just a floor covering," says Louay Azou, the director of Artwood.

Although Barjis was present at the show more as a facilitator than an exhibitor, she did present a few samples of her latest collection, which was created as part of a competition held during Interiors 2011 in Birmingham.

Moving forward, Barjis hopes to showcase young British talent at an average of three shows per year. She will also continue to be heavily involved in the design of the Barjis rugs but is increasingly looking to partner with up-and-coming freelance designers – another prong of her "nurturing new talent" strategy.

For now, there are the abayas to tend to. The new Barjis fashion line has been shortlisted for London Fashion Week, where, if selected, it will celebrate its official launch. "I feel there is huge demand, especially in the UK, where there are modern Muslims living in the West who don't really want to dress like their mothers. They want to stand out, but at the same time they want to respect their faith. It's that passion for fashion coming through, but I was trying to find a niche market where I felt comfortable with what I'm doing."

That's Barjis in a nutshell. Forward-thinking, creative and entrepreneurial, but faithful to her values all the same.



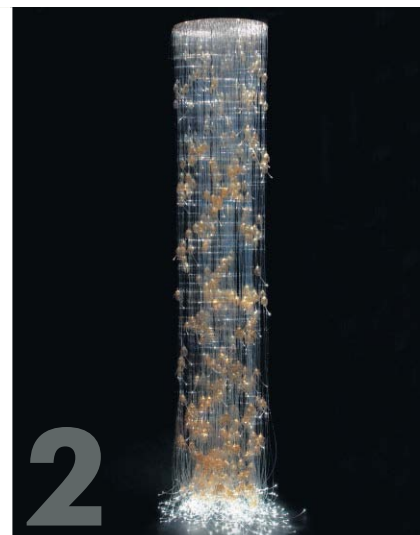
Zita Menyhart Studio's three-piece fibreglass Una coffee table, built-in ice bucket and chair set was among items shown at the recent Interiors UAE. Ravindranath K / The National On the cover, Fromental's delicate hand-painted wallpapers were also featured.

Dubbed "the UAE capital's only design-led, luxury interiors event", Interiors UAE took place at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre from May 9 to 11. Now in its fourth year, the exhibition placed its usual emphasis on high-end, bespoke design, making for an interesting mix of the truly original and the overly elaborate. We sifted through the exhibitors and products on show to present 10 of the best.



### Fromental

We were wowed by the delicacy and intricacy of Fromental's hand-painted, hand-embroidered wallpapers. A pioneer of embellished chinoiserie, Fromental's wallpapers ooze elegance and charm. They are embroidered in silk and metallic threads in hundreds of different colours, with artists spending up to 600 hours stitching each individual panel. Moghul, a new colourway that combines a metal-washed pearl silk background with detailed, soft grey hand embroidery, was presented at Interiors UAE for the first time. Also on show was the eye-catching Prunus, a richly coloured blossom tree design. www.fromental.co.uk



### Sharon Marston

Sharon Marston, a designer of bespoke sculptural lighting installations, presented seven new pieces at Interiors UAE. Among these were Amber, a cascading tower of bronze lotus flowers and glistening fibre-optic elements. Marston specialises in combining fibre optics with unique materials, colours and forms to create a striking, almost ethereal effect. Each piece is designed and handcrafted in the company's London studio and the colours, sizes and finishes of each item can be tailored to individual specifications. www.sharonmarston.com



### Hossein Rezvani

Hossein Rezvani has set out to single-handedly revolutionise the art of Persian carpet making by creating contemporary carpets that combine quality craftsmanship with modern designs. Rezvani's family has worked in the carpet trade for generations, but the 34-year-old German-Iranian decided that it was time to give this ancient art a modern twist. He has developed three distinct collections: Design, Classic and the brand new Persia Reinvented, and presented a range of examples at Interiors UAE. We absolutely love the Tabriz Lilac – and we're not alone. The carpet was honoured with a prestigious Red Dot Design award for 2011. www.hosseinrezvani.com



### Ecosmart

Estelle Gabet's greatest challenge is convincing people in this part of the world that "fire is not only for heat, it is also for design". Gabet is a supplier of Ecosmart Fires, design-led, environmentally friendly, free-standing "fire furniture". Ecosmart Fires are fuelled by bio ethanol, a renewable liquid fuel produced from agricultural by-products. The fires produce no smoke or harmful emissions, and are a stunning addition to any indoor or outdoor space. We are welcome to upload your own image. The wallpaper is water activated, which means it is easy to install, and at Dh180 per square metre, it's affordable, too. www.ohpopsi.ae



### Oh Popsi

"Any image, any wall, any size" is the Oh Popsi promise. Launched in January, this is an online resource that lets you custom-create wallpaper in four idiot-proof steps. It's as simple as choosing your design, inputting the dimensions of your chosen wall and then placing your order. The website offers a gallery of 2,500 images to choose from but if you have something else in mind, you are welcome to upload your own image. The wallpaper is water activated, which means it is easy to install, and at Dh180 per square metre, it's affordable, too. www.ohpopsi.ae



### Smith of Derby

Since 1856, Smith of Derby has been creating public clocks in iconic buildings across the globe. The company used Interiors UAE as a launch pad for its latest creation, the Islamic Clock. A central face displays the local time and is surrounded by five sub-faces that indicate the starting times of that day's prayers. "The clock will reset itself at midnight every night to the following day's starting prayer times," says Bob Betts, the managing director of Smith of Derby. The clock is fully customisable, low maintenance (it has to be programmed on installation but will pretty much look after itself for the next 100 years) and undeniably useful, but comes with a starting price of £20,000 (Dh121,000). www.smithofderby.com



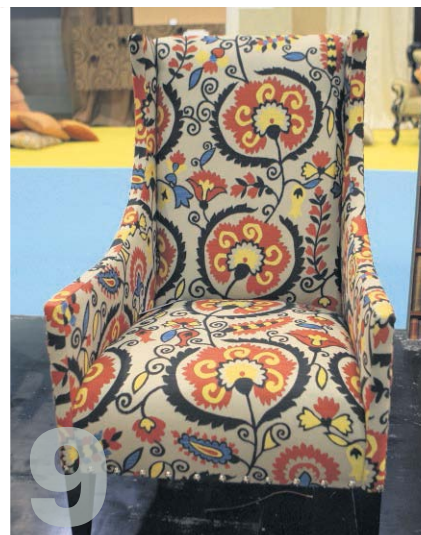
### Tom Raffield

Interiors UAE also afforded us with a sneak peek at the Flock Light, the latest addition to the Tom Raffield lighting collection. The British designer is known for his manipulation of wood and the Flock Light doesn't disappoint. Delicately handcrafted out of steam-bent FSC sycamore, the light is available as a chandelier or as floor, table and wall models. Beautifully organic, the fixture is designed to represent the fluidity of flocking birds. Again, it can be tailored to suit a variety of design specifications. www.tomraffield.com



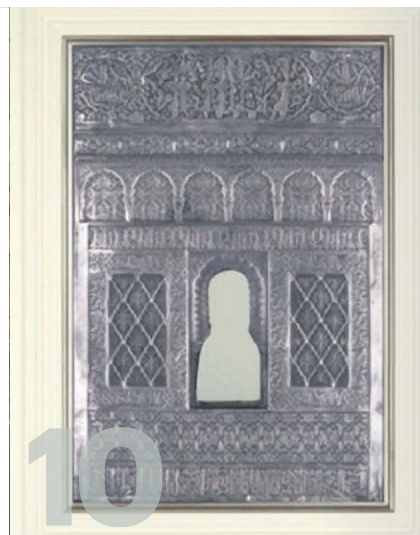
### Damooni Interiors

A surprise find was a collection of vibrant paintings from Damooni Interiors, an Abu Dhabi-based supplier of interior design services and products. The paintings are by an Iraqi artist and combine Middle Eastern scenes with uplifting colour schemes. With prices starting at Dh3,000 they're also a bit of bargain. www.damooni.com



### Andrew Martin

Andrew Martin's two stands offered the usual mix of eclectic furniture items. Particularly striking was the Corrientes armchair in 'Multi'. A new addition to Andrew Martin's fabric collection, Multi's bright, bold prints make it totally on trend. www.andrewmartin.co.uk



### Alhambra Plaques

Recognised as a masterpiece of Islamic architecture, the Alhambra is a hilltop palace and fortress complex in Granada, Spain, built in the mid-14th century. In the 19th century, artists Don Rafael Contreras Y Muños and Rafael Rus created the Alhambra Plaques, hand-carved, exact-scale models of the doorways at the Alhambra. For the 21st century, UK-based Haviland Designs has created a unique collection of fine-art plaques reproduced from those original carvings. The plaques can be supplied either unframed or framed. www.havilanddesigns.com