



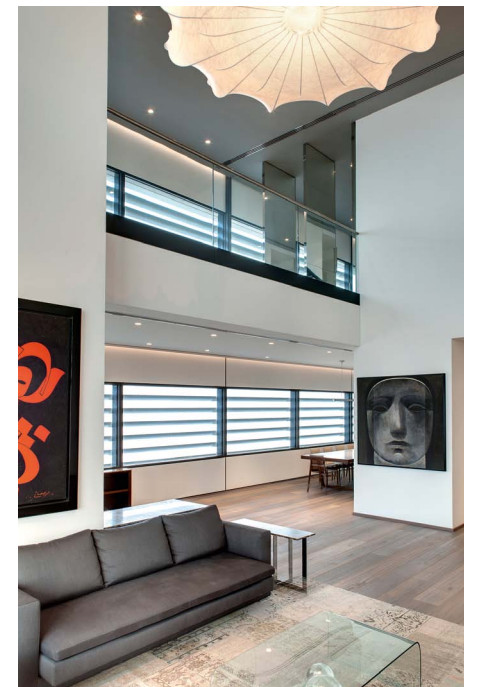
Penthouse in the Index tower, designed by Viktor Udzenija

**S**houtng above the usual morning din at Dubai's Jones The Grocer, we get to know a little more about Viktor Udzenija. Not that we haven't had the benefit of an entire social circle insisting that we absolutely must meet the city's rising starchitect. Not only does he have the resume to justify his status, but he owns that very rare brand of South American suave that makes everyone within a ten mile radius swoon. Tall, elegant, immaculately dressed and as softly spoken and gracious as a humble first timer, this is no newbie to the scene. Viktor was a success story way before he even arrived in the emirates. His passion and skill earned him a coveted place at London's Foster+Partners, after being personally vetted by Lord Foster himself. When he was offered the opportunity, at just 28 years old, to oversee the company's biggest project to date, the Index Tower in DIFC, it was just too good to turn down. "During those three years spent on the project I gained invaluable experience that not many architects get during their entire career," he says over the top of his glass of freshly squeezed carrot juice. We've gone for a healthy breakfast, not that Viktor looks as though anything remotely unhealthy would ever cross his lips. "The tower won the Best new tall building in the Middle East and Africa award which was a great reward for the hard work."

So when the last snag was smoothed out and it was time for him to go home, Viktor found his perceptions had been permanently altered. "I knew Dubai very well already, the local culture, people and market, and had fallen in love with the city. I saw some great opportunities in contemporary architecture and interior design in the region."

Setting up his own practice at the age of 31 was a bold move, one that is already paying dividends. "Local people here, not only UAE nationals, are starting to develop a taste for contemporary spaces and shapes and this is exactly what I would like to be a part of and where I would like to implement my visions."

When he received a commission to design a penthouse unit in the Index tower, it was a perfect fit. Viktor describes the client; an



investment banker with an Arabic background, highly cosmopolitan with a dynamic lifestyle, who wanted a luxurious, clean and neutral open space to act as a backdrop for his growing collection of Middle Eastern art.

Drastically remodeling the space, Viktor loosely demarcated formal, entertainment and private spaces within the apartment. The seven-meter-high ceilings in the main living areas make the biggest design statement; enhanced by the dark grey ceilings and narrow streamlined curtains along the full height windows. The drama is amped up by the oversized chandeliers and wall lights. "The layout has gone through some drastic transformations," explains Viktor. "There is a free flow of movement now and views of the city open up wherever you stand."

Clean architectural shapes and high quality natural materials; stone, glass and wood, create a strong, light and masculine feel, with some clever details like the private gym located on the upper floor where a solid wall was substituted by full height pivoted mirror panels, each of them weighing several hundred kilograms, that can be operated smoothly with one finger.

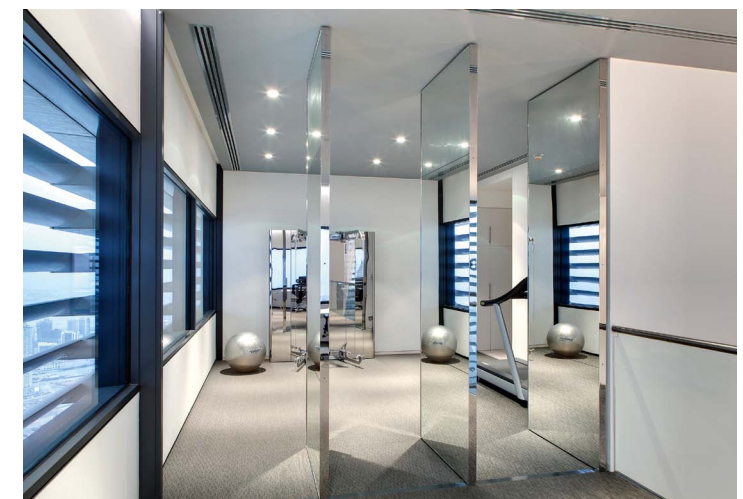
Unsurprisingly, Viktor and his team are busy with a roster of new projects. As we endure the excruciating wait for our bill, he gives us the scoop, which includes a 20,000sqf sustainably built, highly contemporary private residence in Khawaneej. It's all part of his mission to create fresh, exciting edifices to redefine our landscape as one not merely of quantity but quality too. ■

To commission, go to [viktorudzenija.com](http://viktorudzenija.com)

WORDS BY RUE KOTHARI



Opposite page: Viktor at home in his apartment in Dubai's World Trade Centre



Right: The bespoke gym in the penthouse has glass panel doors that can be manoeuvred with the lightest touch



# THE STYLE INDEX

Debonair architect  
**VIKTOR UDZENIJA'S**  
lofty designs are all  
sense and substance

