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Decade of diversification

By Nicole Swengley

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The global design landscape has shifted radically since the millennium. New materials, processes and technologies offer far greater freedom for today's designers to express themselves.

New motivations, too, are revealed in the past decade's creations. Engaged in an increasingly direct dialogue with homeowners, creatives strive both to address the problems of modern living and react to broader social, cultural, political and environmental issues.

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Is a shared approach apparent? Not specifically, although certain patterns have emerged. A blurring of previously distinct disciplines – craft, engineering, architecture, design – is generating exciting interactions while new, often industrial materials and technologies offer greater scope for experimentation.

Technology is also shaping the way designers work. For example, the internet allows Munich-based Clemens Weisshar and Stockholm-based Reed Kram to collaborate as if in the same office. Similarly, online magazines and blogs accelerate sharing of ideas.

Aesthetically, fresh shapes and forms are emerging, yet many designers choose to reference nostalgic or traditional styles so as to forge an emotional bond with homeowners.

Meanwhile a resurgence of craft-based techniques and low-tech production methods is satisfying homeowners' fascination with process and provenance. Recycled materials and found objects provide inexpensive ways to experiment while offering an implicit commentary on consumerism. Environmental issues particularly concern younger designers who are keen to use eco-friendly materials and methods while resolving problems such as energy consumption.

The decade has certainly kick-started a more diverse approach. "It was a 'messy' decade for categorisation," says Murray Moss of the influential New York and Los Angeles design gallery Moss. "It introduced the notion that function (design) and expression (art) need not be mutually exclusive. And it reflected the dramatic expansion of design from the rigid problem-solving/form-follows-function definition that originated in the 1930s to the use of functional objects as a canvas for conceptual ideas and philosophies."

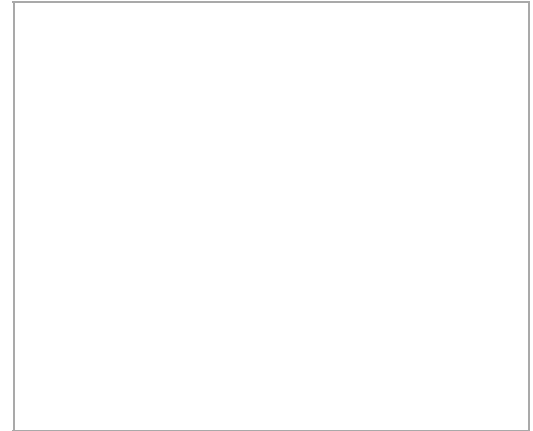
"Today's design students are educated to think and practice much more fluidly, incorporating craft, industrial and interior design, graphics, video and so on into their realm of activities," he adds. "This is not dilettantism or schizophrenia. This is evolution – with the artist/designer/philosopher/poet/industrial problem-solver as its protagonist."

While looking back to outstanding pieces of the past decade, this top 10 reveals the direction designers will take in shaping our future home environments. We might live in an uncertain world but contemporary design remains a thrillingly creative force.

2000

VIP chair by Marcel Wanders

Dutch designer Wanders styled the Netherlands' Pavilion's VIP room at the Hanover World Expo in 2000



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as a woodland ice-rink and included 44 wool-covered armchairs. The VIP chair has flared “trousers” to conceal castors, giving the impression it can skate on ice. It is produced by Dutch company Moooi, of which Wanders is creative director. “I want to make products that are well-worn favourites even when being first introduced,” he says. “Objects that touch you and generate a positive feeling. Objects worth bonding with for a lifetime.”



2001

Table #1 by Fredrikson Stallard

Using raw birch, lashed with a steel strap, design duo Patrik Fredrikson and Ian Stallard created a table (in a limited edition for David Gill Galleries) that looks like a simple bunch of untreated wooden logs. The raw look is contrasted by the perfectly smooth top surface and although the logs appear to be lashed together, hovering above the ground, the structure stands on metal feet. “At the time nothing like this had been done before,” says Stallard. “None of the [subsequent copies] has matched the true, honest beauty of this piece as they always opt for a too-rough, amateur feel or a too-polished, commercial feel.”



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2002

Louis Ghost chair by Philippe Starck

Maverick French designer Starck playfully referenced historical antiques in his styling of Louis Ghost while pushing the boundaries of injection-moulded polycarbonate. By persuading Italian manufacturer Kartell to invest in the very expensive moulds and machinery needed for production, he raised the generic profile of plastic furniture. The transparent design looks like glass yet is stable, durable, scratch- and weather-resistant. It was an immediate hit and 100,000 sold within three years. Transparent and coloured versions are in production.



2003

Favela chair by Fernando and Humberto Campana

Based in São Paulo, the Brazilian-born Campana brothers design furniture that draws attention to the differences between rich and poor. Discarded materials – wood off-cuts, rags, plastic tubing, corrugated cardboard – and artisanal techniques typify their work, which aims to transform modest materials into joyful designs. The Favela armchair is constructed from the same wood used to build *favela* (shanty town) huts, with every piece hand-glued and nailed. “Our designs were born in the street from the urban kitsch of the popular quarters,” says Humberto Campana. Designed in 1991, it was first produced by the Italian manufacturer Edra in 2003 and remains in production.



2004

Lolita chandelier by Ron Arad

Arad has consistently subverted the boundaries between genres with his irreverent, experimental approach and was quick to explore interactive electronics and digital technology. The Lolita chandelier, created for Swarovski’s



Crystal Palace

collection, debuted at the Milan Salone Internazionale del Mobile in 2004. It is comprised of 2,100 crystals, lit from within by 1,050 LEDs, arranged as a ceiling-hung spiral. The chandelier acts as a pixel-board to display SMS text messages. It was made in a limited edition of 25, of which seven are available.

2005**Cinderella table by Jeroen Verhoeven**

Dutch designer Verhoeven pushed the boundaries of computer numerically controlled (CNC) cutting technology by creating the Cinderella table while still a student at Design Academy Eindhoven. He morphed the outline of a baroque table with a bombe commode on a computer then split the shape into 57 slices, CNC-cut on all sides, to create the complex curves that form a hollow, hand-finished table made of 741 plywood layers. It showed that craftsmanship could be injected into industrial, computerised production. Made in a limited edition of 20, many were bought by museums while a few remain available from Friedman Benda, New York, and Haunch of Venison, London.

**2006****Bone chaise and chair by Joris Laarman**

With the help of carmaker Opel, another Design Academy Eindhoven graduate, Joris Laarman, created an algorithm that mimics the natural growth of trees and bones (trees add material while bones remove structurally superfluous matter). Laarman's software designed chairs that share the lightness and complexity of natural shapes. He cast the chair in aluminium and the chaise from a translucent polyurethane resin. "[The software] quite literally copies the way evolution constructs," says Laarman. The limited edition of 12 all sold, with at least six on show in international collections.

**2007****Home Work by Studio Job**

This suite of eight oversized cooking pots, lanterns, stools and a coal bin was made in polished bronze and produced in collaboration with the Netherlands' Groninger Museum and design retailer Moss, in a limited edition of five. It was conceived and made by two Design Academy Eindhoven graduates – Belgian-born Job Smeets and Nynke Tynagel from the Netherlands – who work as Studio Job. Magnifying household objects to gigantic proportions and placing them on aged, wooden pedestals like precious statuary transformed humble domestic objects into heroic sculptures.

**2008****Fig Leaf Wardrobe by Tord Boontje**

Commissioned for Meta's launch collection by Mallett, the New York and London-based antiques dealer, the wardrobe's intricacy limits annual production to three per year. The exterior is covered in 616 hand-painted, enamelled copper leaves while the silk-lined interior is fitted with bespoke bronze branches used as hangers. The concept is humorous but the craftsmanship is painstaking, with the leaves made by the last enamel painters still working in England.

**2009****Blow Away vase by Front**

The young, Swedish, female foursome working as Front hit the international design radar with their life-sized, ceramic horse lamp for Moooi (2006). Last year Moooi showed Front's Blow Away vase in Milan and it has now



been selected for the new ceramic galleries at London's V&A museum. The design, which is made by Royal Delft artisans, looks like a traditional blue-and-white Delft vase in the process of destruction by gale-force winds. It is available from Moooi.



Do you agree with this selection? Post your own nominations for the outstanding designs of the past 10 years below

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John Stainer | January 17 6:07pm | [Permalink](#) [Report](#)

Nice designs, but I feel it is a waste to send new furniture straight to a museum. The items should be used for a while, to demonstrate that they can serve the function for which they were designed.

Judith | January 17 2:31pm | [Permalink](#) [Report](#)

Nice to see that 6 out of 10 designs are of Dutch origin.

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