

The drivers of design looking forward

By Adele Wapnick, founding partner of Cross Colours

There are many factors shaping the face of design today - perhaps one of the starkest developments is the blurring of the line of between design disciplines. This has led to extraordinary convergence with exceptional outcomes.

In practical terms, this means that talent and vision is being transmuted across all the practices of design: from interior to architecture, graphic to product, fashion to food design - drawing on eclectic influences to create new horizons.

Antonio Citterio is a celebrated Italian architect and designer and epitomises this multidisciplinary approach: he studied architecture in Milan, practised industrial design and by the 90's built an international reputation as a furniture designer.

Fabien Baron is a French designer, well known for the graphic design of Madonna's infamous "Sex" book. Originally a creative director and graphic designer, Fabien was the one of the first to breakdown the barriers between art direction, industrial and product design, commercial directing and then photography and furniture design.

He can design *anything*.

And for some in the business of design, drawing on different disciplines has been become a core philosophy. Jump - an architectural studio in London, is built on this diversity. They believe that real design innovation comes from breaking the barriers between creative disciplines. They collaborate with international innovators from fashion, art and anthropology, through to academics.

Another influencing factor is collaboration – an unexpected intermingling of design philosophies that drives new perspectives and insights. Arguably the most famous collaboration is between Philippe Starck and Ian Shragar, which allowed Starck to make his mark on some of the hippest hotels in the world. Starck also collaborated with developer, John Hitchcox to establish a company called Yoo that provides lifestyle apartments to 'improve the quality of lives'.

Celebrities too, are increasingly prolific and seemingly omnipotent design deities setting trends and swinging opinion of what's cool. How often have we seen celebs traipsing down the red carpet at the Oscars setting design trends in motion that become widely followed?

Another example of their influence is evident in Habitat's Very Important Product (VIP) Collection. The collection - which includes items such as a Carla Bruni hammock chair; a Linford Christie runner shoe storage box; Ewan McGregor director's chair; and a Manolo Blahnik shoehorn – influences design and people's purchasing decisions.

Probably the biggest influence in design, is conscience. This has happened as people have become more aware of social issues like poverty and sustainability. People understand that what we are doing to the earth is damaging and unsustainable and so I expect that future designers and youngsters coming through will tend to have more concern for the environment and social issues. They realise that they still have their lives to lead, and will want the best living

environment for their children. This will have a profound influence on the future of design.

Aside from convergence, another influencing factor is a return of design that is borne out of necessity. This is having its greatest impact on product design.

For example, the creation of a new product called a 'Hipporoller'. It is a plastic drum with lawn-mower-like handles and it is used primarily in rural areas for people to collect water from far away. Instead of walking with a water barrel on their heads, they roll the drum which aside from being easier to transport, simultaneously purifies the water within.

Design borne from necessity is also starting to influence other areas including furniture and décor. There is a group of entrepreneurs in Brazil called the Campana Brothers who are creating the most awe inspiring furniture. Their recycled chairs are made from materials such as rope and strips of fabric and felt.

These sell for between \$10 000 or \$15 000 a chair!

These products are completely hand crafted and although it is not out of necessity, need does start to influence people and the way that they design.

The emergence of 3rd world recycled objects has become quite trendy and fashionable, even in places like Europe. Tom Dickson, who collaborates with Conrad, does the most innovative pieces using old materials like bricks and inner tubes of tyres to create interesting furnishings.

Designers and 'need' are also driving the democratisation of luxury items. Clothes by top designers can be found, made simpler and cheaper, in regular department stores. Many designers understand the need to appeal to both ends of the market and are making their products accessible to a wider audience. There is a danger in this as we all understand the human need for aspiration, and the need for 'drivers' of that process. I suppose we can rely on companies like Louis Vuitton and Gucci for this!

A backlash against the proliferation of designer brands sees the return of the craftsman. People suffering from 'designer brand fatigue' are seeking individuality and uniqueness in art, jewellery and even furniture. They are commissioning works to suit their needs and lifestyle. This is partly as a result of the commercialisation of luxury brands, and the need to create a truly exclusive and beautiful thing.

The overall concept facing the future of design is a complex issue. Of one thing we can be certain, there will always be paradoxes. People will always want quality, but convenience too. They will seek out products that are natural and distilled, but enjoy the surprise element of glam. There will be some nostalgia, and some futurism, some pragmatism, some frivolity, and in all of this lies the delight and charm of the design process.

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