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*DESIGNINTERIORSFASHIONARTLIFESTYLE

OPTIC NERVE

Bold lines, smart tricks
and new perspectives

Cover by Sarah Morris

HORSEPOWER
The best build for Ferrari

BROKERS IN THE PACK
Design's new dealers



TAXIDERMY TODAY
The stuffed that surrounds us



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Why architects and designers are taking a flight of fancy to strange new worlds

Above, Claudia and Harry Washington with their new 'Kana' chair in their San Salvador studio, see page 077

Left, our projected stuffing-centric spin-off title didn't get beyond the dummy stage. We just weren't convinced it would fly, see page 082

STEPS TO SUCCESS

The Washingtons, second and fourth from left, and three of the local craftsmen with whom they collaborate. In the foreground is 'Kana', a new chair design by the couple



Due process

San Salvador's Due Studio combines high design with local know-how

Imagine a place where booze is cheap and rents are next to nothing. The surrounding landscape is bathed in sunshine and lush rainforests give way to breathtaking beaches. White waves break on black sand and smoking volcanoes dot the horizon, their purple plumes the only clouds in the turquoise sky. The mood is laid-back, and the locals are cool, creative and beautiful.

This otherworldly idyll is El Salvador, and the locals include Harry and Claudia Washington, two visionary young designers living and working in San Salvador, a city once devastated by gang violence and guerrilla warfare. Since the fighting ended 17 years ago, the tiny nation has gained ground as a haven for tourists, tycoons and property developers. And as the Washingtons

launch their work globally, it looks like it's on its way to becoming a destination for design.

Harry and Claudia met while studying at Dr José Matías Delgado University in San Salvador, where they dreamed of rebuilding the war-torn capital. They set up Due (pronounced *do-ay*), their studio, in 2004, then spent the following year studying furniture design in Milan. They returned to join a new wave of architects and designers pioneering a fresh vision for the nation.

'Contemporary design is still very young in El Salvador,' explains Harry. 'The role of the designer is better understood in neighbouring capitals like Mexico City and Buenos Aires, where designers have revitalised parts of the city. But working in a small country like ours makes it >>>



easier to establish a dialogue, and find ways of working together.'

El Salvador is also rebuilding its industrial base, which was wiped out during the 12-year civil war. Access to natural resources is restricted and importing can be problematic but Harry and Claudia remain optimistic. 'Growing up in El Salvador teaches you to overcome adversity,' they explain. 'The country is rich in artisans, so we can find techniques that produce modern, industrial-looking products, even though they may have to be manufactured by hand.'

Their 'Olga' chair, a chic lounge comprising a stainless steel frame and a corset-like sheath, was handmade by a saddle-maker, while 'L'Astiko', another version of the chair, was the result of material innovation. 'We were looking for a material that would fit the frame in an unstructured way, without compromising functionality,' says Claudia. 'All we could find was the rubber inner tubes we use for binding wood pieces while the glue dries.'

The laid-back 'Lola' chair and footstool are also a combination of high design and local know-how. 'We were looking for



CHAIR BEAUTY

Top, the 'Lola' lounge recalls mid-century style. Above, the loosely woven seat of 'L'Astiko' is made from rubber inner tubes

a technique that would create a firm seat and backrest, but with the comfort of a hammock,' explains Claudia. 'Lola' has a strong retro signature which links it to mid-century furniture, and to movements such as the California Modern style.

Along with several other designers from El Salvador, the Washingtons were chosen to receive funding from the United States Agency for International Development, which facilitated their exhibiting last year at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York. It was here they caught the eye of Jerry Helling, the creative director of Bernhardt Design.

Bernhardt's Global Edition is launched annually at the Salone del Mobile in Milan. The collection typically includes designers from different cultures, who work to a similar design brief. 'It was obvious the moment I met Harry and Claudia that they were incredibly talented,' says Jerry. 'Their brief was to create a seating collection that combined the most appealing aspects of residential and commercial design while blending in modern and classical styling. Aspiring to create a sofa that would be ideal for many different people may seem easy, but it's quite a challenge in practice.'

The couple sketched and storyboarded 30 designs before choosing 'Calibra'. 'Our brief was to design well-proportioned, generous seating that would appear lightweight,' says Harry. 'To our surprise we found inspiration in a sketch of a pig ballerina dancing en pointe. The furniture needed to be sizeable to be truly comfortable, but we wanted the pieces to appear as if they were floating.'

The couple bulked up the overstuffed padding to give the pieces substantial silhouettes, then broke down their mass by creating V-shaped cuts in the sides to differentiate the armrests from the back. They perched the pieces atop streamlined legs crafted in burnished metal, made so sleek that they appear to disappear where they meet the floor. 'To detract from the furniture's mass, we designed the legs as if they were pieces of jewellery,' says Harry, 'which creates the illusion that the furniture is much lighter.'

Despite the ease with which the Washingtons have gained acclaim in the US and Europe, they are committed to staying put. 'We'd like to turn our country's crafts into globally recognised production techniques, and make it easier for El Salvadorans to realise their designs,' says Harry. 'Right now, we're not sure how to make that happen, but so far our goals have been achieved by believing in the final outcome, not by worrying about the path that will take us there.'

www.duecestudio.com

See 'Calibra' at www.wallpaper.com *