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design quarterly

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VOL.
35
2009
SPRING
\$9.00
AUD
\$9.00
NZD



New

Dutch design is more than a style, it's a mentality. And while it's a century-old culture, there's no stopping the new wave of Dutch designers revitalising old traditions. We join Ingeborg van Lieshout as she explores a new generation of trendsetters in Dutch design.

Behind every Dutch designed object is an economic and cultural ethos that extends beyond the product itself. You can find it in the lamp constructed from 85 light bulbs by Rody Graumans for Droog design, or the 'Red-Blue' chair, designed by Gerrit Rietveld in 1923. In defining Dutch design one must go beyond the superficial, and consider the conceptual, innovative, individualistic and pragmatic.

Dutch design is more than just a style, it's an intellectual process in which experimentation, autonomy, austerity and practicality come together. This has been the mantra of Dutch design since the 1920s, and remains the essence of contemporary Dutch design.

So, what are the trends driving today's Dutch designers, and who is it driving the trends? Here we outline five major themes representing the latest design movements, new-found niches, stand-out projects and innovative ideas.



02

SUPERUSE

Superuse moves away from recycling, instead finding new functions for old products. Rather than altering the product, you find a different use for it.

Superuse.org is an online community where creative thinkers share their finds, unveiling brilliant ideas, such as Rodrigo Piwonka's empty CD-spindle which makes the perfect bagel-sized lunch box.

"It's a matter of taking a closer look," says designer Frederike Top. While working at retail fashion outlet H&M, Top discovered the store's clothing hangers had a similar curve to that of the human neck. Using broken coat hangers, she created an attractive wearable neck piece. "I've created it to show that something worthless can become priceless."

Another good example is 'Handbag Annie' by Henk Stallinga. Created using two dustpans, this superused object made it all the way to San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art.

Anyone can superuse, and if you can't, you copy. Bloggers on Superuse.org show the core of their ideas and share the formula. Instructions and manuals are uploaded, although the process is usually self-explanatory.

Superuse
superuse.org

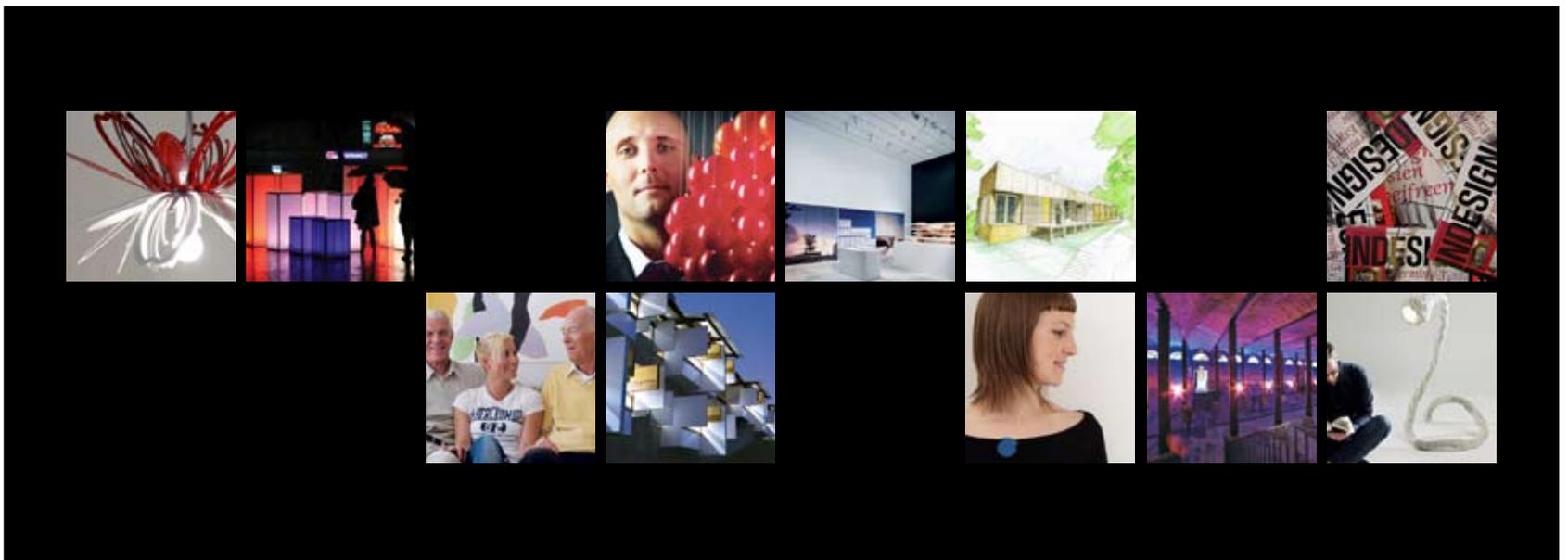
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- 01 'Bagel-to-go', submitted by Rodrigo Piwonka on Superuse.org
- 02 'Handbag Annie' by Henk Stallinga
- 03 'Exploded Chandelier' by Ward van Gemert
- 04 'Åstrid' lamp by Lisette Haasnoot
- 05 'Platonic Sun' by Daniel Saakes



01



CH

Touch

RECONSTRUCTIVISM

Reconstructivism has sprouted from the likes of eBay and garage sales. Reconstructivists take objects they've found on eBay or 'acquired' at a garage sale, analyse the parts, deconstruct them and give them a new form.

Reconstructivism, as Ward van Gemert works it, results in creations such as the 'Exploded Chandelier', which appears as if frozen mid-explosion. As you can see, even its electric wiring is integral to its overall appearance.

"I always send the person from whom I bought the original a picture of the final piece," says van Gemert, who took a nondescript cafeteria chair and exploded it into design classics like the chaise lounge by Le Corbusier and Marcel Breuer's 'Wassily' chair.

Another reconstructivist, Ruud van Hemert, makes good use of inherited oak cabinets and other grandmotherly furniture. Van Hemert takes wooden objects of sentimental value and cuts these into wooden boards and pieces. The outcome is 'Replex', a series of wooden slithers and splices which you can rebuild at whim, transforming old furniture into a more modern, contemporary form.

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03



05

HACKING

Who would have thought a flatpack from IKEA could be the source of new forms of creativity? The instructions included in most IKEA items prevent you from composing anything other than that which is dictated on the box.

Hacking IKEA is a perfect example of the hacking trend and explores what can be made with just the few items provided. The less freedom, the bigger the challenge for the hacker at hand. As a finishing touch, the IKEA style manual needs to be included, so IKEA buyers worldwide can make the design.

For the adventurous IKEA hacker, your options are endless: the 'Poang' chair can be rearranged as a sled. Buy the 'Lampan' lamp, which can be constructed using six, 12 or 24 pieces, and you're ready to build a 'Platonic Sun' as instructed by Daniel Saakes.

The most modest hack to date was created by Lisette Haasnoot who bought the 'Åstrid' lamp, followed the lines of the life-size images on the cardboard box with her cardboard cutters and simply placed a bulb inside. Haasnoot then returned the lamp without the box and received a refund. She cheekily hacked both the product and the system.

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04

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01

“It moves us away from cherishing the importance of a singular object.”

DESIGN ON TECHNO-TIME

“Why should rooms consist of floors, walls and ceilings? Ideally they should follow the space needed for your activity,” says Daan Roosegaarde whose latest work, ‘Liquid Space 6.0’, reacts to the movement and speech of the inhabitant.

The fluid architecture utilises sensors, LEDs, embedded electronics and homemade software. Dimensions? One moment it’s 15 feet high, and in the next it’s 5 feet. In a way, Roosegaarde gives the design away to the user.

Also pioneering this trend is Elastik Architecture studio, whose collaborative project entitled ‘KT: The Listening Room’ lets music design a room. ‘KT’, which made its debut at Tokyo Designers Week 2008, is a space ruled by soundwaves caught in foam and fibreboard panelling.

“[Here] the parameters of program, location, material, finance, technology and soundwaves all bargain with each other, [within the realm of] a computer program, to develop the final design,” says designer Igor Kebel. “It moves us away from cherishing the importance of a singular object. We design relations instead of chairs, shelves, tables, and are interested in how they work together in an integrated state.”

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02

STARTING CONVERSATIONS

FIND YOUR NEW JOB IN THE DESIGN INDUSTRY

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01
'Liquid Space 6.0' by
Daan Roosegaarde
02
'KT: The Listening
Room'
03
Finished object,
created by 'The Idea
of a Tree'
04
'The Idea of a Tree'
apparatus
05
'Colour-In Dress' by
Berber Soepboer &
Michiel Schuurman



DESIGNED 'BY THE OWNER'

Exploring the force-field between mass production and custom design is Thomas Traxler's 'The Idea of a Tree' project. This solar-powered furniture-making apparatus lets the sun design the benches and lamp shades. Driven by a combination of natural sunlight and mechanical process, sunrays are captured through solar panels and translated through a mechanical process into an object (with one object created per day). Totally dependent upon sunlight, the apparatus actually incorporates the light intensity into the object. Dark and thin parts result from little sun, bright and thick areas result from lots of sun. The resulting object is a souvenir of the day and place of creation. You can catch the machine in motion at Designguide.tv

Also placing the design in the hands of the owner is Berber Soepboer and Michiel Schuurman's 'Colour-In Dress'. This do-it-yourself creation comes complete with a set of waterproof markers – you know what to do! Partly designed by the wearer, the garment becomes more precious. And, as Soepboer says, "When clothes are cared for, people tend to wear it longer, which makes the dress durable." It's her reaction to rapidly changing fashion and mass production.

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