

DESIGNING TO RESIGNIFY REALITY

MEXICAN INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

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Canadian designer Tate Linden says that design is an opportunity to continue telling the story, not just to sum it all up. And it's exactly that continual becoming that those who work projecting the future through creative solutions to the requirements and needs of their society forge day to day.

Mexican industrial design has developed rapidly in recent times. Not only do more and better designers come on the scene every day, but almost all spheres of society are touched by design, from the smallest devices, to the projections of urban design. Today, this profession is fully integrated into the culture it has grown up in, facing big challenges of all kinds: political, economic, social, and environmental. In this framework, and from a globalized society, innumerable distinct, interesting creative proposals exist.



Cooperativa panorámica,
Container, 2013
(terrazzo).



Photo by Mercury

Alejandro Buendía,
Top, 2013
(pressboard and iron).

One of these has been adopted by certain Mexican designers, who have decided to tell the story by resignifying traditions and some of the specific characteristics of our culture, and by placing new value on traditional trades, with which they establish a face-to-face dialogue. In this sense, designers are increasingly aware that their work consists not only of creating an object as though it had emerged from nothing, but also of finding out about traditional materials and the possibility of using new inputs, as well as of questioning traditional models and productive processes to enrich them with other productive proposals, like collaborating with small artisanal workshops. This new way of seeing has allowed several contemporary designers to project a kind of design capable of harmonizing tradition with innovation.

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All photos except those by Mercury are courtesy of Cooperativa Panorámica and Ariel Rojo, respectively.



Cooperativa Panorámica,
Folding Tray, 2013
(metal sheet finished in copper).

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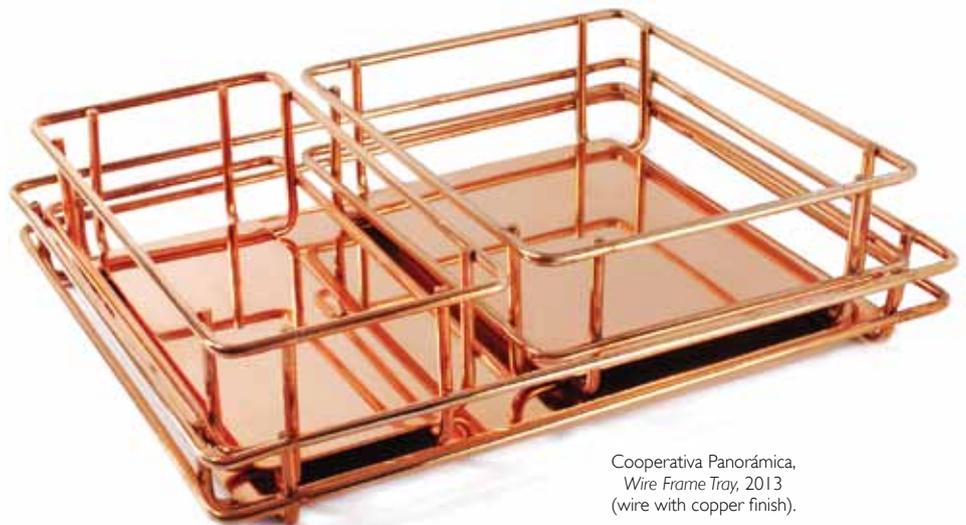


Ariel Rojo, *Alma Rhomboid Chair Group*, 2013 (aluminium).



Ariel Rojo, *Spiral Lamp*, 2008 (wood).

Resignifying design by integrating art, industry, tradition, aesthetic values, and functionality is the new mark of Mexican industrial design, which seems to penetrate more and more comfortably into the international sphere.



Cooperativa Panorámica,
Wire Frame Tray, 2013
(wire with copper finish).

The integration of folk art forms, motifs, and colors, the re-interpretation of furniture, the re-utilization of objects and ornaments, and the dialogue among opposed productive processes, like artisanal, one-of-a-kind creation versus mass production, and increasing concern with sustainability are the new hallmarks of contemporary design. It seems that this new concept has managed to transcend the stereotype that dominated the profession for years: pre-Hispanic motifs, loud colors, and aesthetic references to what used to be associated with what was “very Mexican.” One example of these new expressions is the famous Acapulco chair, which has become an object representative of a place, a climate, and a culture. This anonymously-designed chair created in the 1950s had been forgotten, but today has come alive again thanks to being taken up by contemporary design. The Common Project, a collective, has reinvented the chair without abandoning its original design, improving a few details, but preserving the weaving technique used by the Mayas for making their hammocks. Since this design was re-interpreted, many variants have been created, like rocking chairs, magazine racks, and stools.

Resignifying design by integrating art, industry, tradition, aesthetic values, and functionality is the new mark of Mexican industrial design, which seems to penetrate more and more comfortably into the international sphere. To get to know a little more about this, we talked to three designers about the links between design today and traditions, creative processes, and the materials they use.

Ariel Rojo QUESTIONS REALITY

Outstanding Mexican designer Ariel Rojo studied industrial design at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). From a very young age, he began delving into design, but it was in 2002 that he launched his first personal project about Mexican identity, which initially looked into our culture and then reinterpreted it: MX Reload. Since then, all Rojo’s designs allude to some reference point—even if apparently imperceptible— of Mexican culture. Through his discourse, Rojo attempts to convince the public that “global societies exist thanks to the points of origin of their members, and the idea is not to harmonize cultures, but to share them.” That is why his creations constantly bring into play counterposed elements—whether in terms of time, form, or motif—that he manages to harmonize precisely thanks to the design itself. Examples of this are his wall coverings, which at first glance seem very modern. However, in essence, these surfaces



Cooperativa Panorámica, *Hanging Pot and Bird Feeder*, 2013 (terrazzo).



Cooperativa Panorámica, *Basalt Stool and Multipurpose Container*, 2013 (basalt and wood).

“Culture does not determine how you design, but it is undoubtedly reflected in the designs, even if this doesn’t mean that in our case we can speak of a specifically Mexican design.”



Ariel Rojo, *Neighboring Radio*, 2013 (wood and textiles).



Cooperativa Panorámica,
Countertop Mirror. 2013
(basalt stone and mirror).

involve a modern look at or a reinterpretation of traditional Mexican Talavera pottery. Also, in addition to his designs being a constant reference to popular Mexican culture, they are also imbued with social and political events in our country. For example, the amusing “Money-laundering Piggy-banks, No Commission” is a sharp critique of the policy that allows this illegal practice. Another of his designs, “Noah Noah, the Little Thrifty Pigg,” is a piggy-bank in a lamp, with which the designer attempts to create awareness about the importance of saving energy; or the sugar bowl dubbed “Sweet Death,” which plays with the special idea we Mexicans have of death. In the words of Ariel Rojo, “Mexican culture is so vast and different that if we make an analogy with the world of fragrances, Mexico is a perfume factory with thousands and thousands of aromas,” shown by the great variety and versatility of sizes, shapes, and materials in his designs. info@arielrojo.com

Alejandro Buendía, CHASING ROOTS

A graduate in industrial design from the Iberoamerican University (UIA), Alejandro Buendía Hegewisch has dedicated his career to designing furniture and ornaments around the artistic scene. For Buendía, design must reflect its surroundings as well as a quest for identity and belonging; for that, it must use local resources and materials for the production of unique objects, counterposed to the globalized production of disposable items. But for this designer, reality is quite different: “Today, it’s hard to find objects that reflect our roots. There have been some industrial design initiatives that have tried it, but where they have really been reflected has been in textile design. Culture does not determine how you design, but it is undoubtedly reflected in the designs, even if this doesn’t mean that in our case we can speak of a specifically Mexican design. For example, we have repeatedly seen an object and said, ‘That’s a Japanese design,’ because there’s a stamp that links the design to certain countries. But in Mexico, that hasn’t been achieved yet.”

Recently, Buendía has experimented with Mexican toys in designing furniture built with wood indigenous to the country, specifically from the Southeast: “These pieces emerge from nostalgia for things we’re losing, the toys of our childhood like wooden yo-yos, marbles, or a cup-and-ball, which are practically never seen anymore. That’s why these designs are an attempt to preserve our memories.” His chests-of-drawers festooned with tops and cups-and-balls, chairs with backs covered with wooden toys, are a sample of his interest not only in remembering the childhood of a generation, but also in resig-



Photo by Mercury

Alejandro Buendía, Chest of Drawers
with Cups-and-balls, 2013 (wood).



Ariel Rojo, *Tzompantli*, 2008 (ceramic).

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Ariel Rojo, *Money-laundering Money Box*, 2011 (ceramic).



Cooperativa Panorámica,
Glass Multipurpose Container, 2013
(recycled glass and wood).

“Using references to our culture is a subtle way of imprinting this Mexican identity on objects that can work in any contemporary home, no matter what country they’re in.”



Ariel Rojo, *Línea Alma. Bench with Back*, 2013 (100% recycled aluminium).



Alejandro Buendía, *Star*, 2013
(wood and iron).

Photo by Mercury

nifying these playful objects using them in making furniture.
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Glocal Panorama

Ian Ortega, Víctor Alemán, José de la O., Moisés Hernández, Joel Escalona Christian Vivanco, and Diego Jorge Etienne are the seven designers who, based on an artisanal cooperative business model, formed the Panorámica design firm. Like for Ariel Rojo and Alejandro Buendía, for these young designers, “the context in which we act influences the design we produce. Regardless of the fact that we’re working on a global level, creating products that will be sold in different countries and even different continents, it’s inevitable that our work will have traits of Mexican identity.” Proof of this is “Materiality,” a collection of objects exalting the everyday materials used in our context like basalt, terrazzo, copper, or glass, most unfamiliar to inhabitants of contemporary cities. The Panorámica cooperative’s products are made in Mexico by a network of independent artisans and workshops, but, in addition, in the minds of their creators, they are conceived of as a means of expression. For that reason, in addition to their physical and functional qualities, the objects attempt to awaken criticism and foster diversity and inclusion.

“What we were looking for with ‘Materiality’ was to reflect about the possibility of redefining the identity of these noble materials that accompany us every day in our routine, through a collection that highlighted their unique beauty. More than transmitting an aesthetic or style, we sought to show new ways of working, whether by reinterpreting the materials and processes or by using different business models that allow us to go beyond Mexico and be players on the global market,” says Diego Jorge Etienne. The basalt mirror imitating a totem pole, trays made of metal sheets and finished in copper, inspired by a pinwheel, the containers for food, or the objects made out of terrazzo, are a sample of this design firm’s original concept.

From one-of-a-kind objects to mass production, pieces by contemporary designers have a common stamp: the search for original foundations of Mexican culture and the experimentation with materials and production techniques in dialogue with innovative trends. More and more Mexican initiatives are competing on the global market and, as one of Panorámica’s designers said, “Using references to our culture is a subtle way of imprinting this Mexican identity on objects that can work in any contemporary home, no matter what country they’re in.”
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