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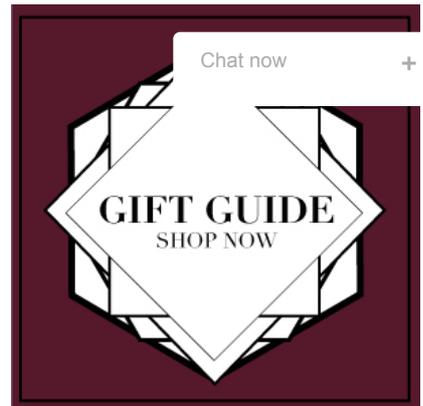
DESIGN+ THIS WEEK

INTERVIEW WITH HOUSE OF TODAY DESIGNER MARC BAROUD

NOV 20, 2015



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Who or what are your influences?

I'm differently influenced by different people. In terms of classical designers I would say that Jean Prouvé has influenced me the most. I really admire his approach to furniture and how he builds things. Currently, I am really into the Radical Design movement that emerged towards the end of the seventies especially the work of Ettore Sottsass Jr. and Gaetano Pesce. When I was a student I didn't fully understand what they were doing, but now with the emergence of mass customization and the death of standards, I see that these guys were thinking and talking about what is happening today, back in the 80s! In terms of writing, excluding design thinking, research, and literature from the last ten years, I'm very influenced by the writings of Andrea Branzi, especially his book 'Learning from Milan'. Like the Radicals he was almost prophetic, writing about issues that are relevant today, decades before they happened, issues like the post modernist area, the post industrialist area, how production would change the paradigm. He has one line about 80s design that really resonates with me - "they were looking for the standard that would fit everybody but that nobody really liked at the end of the day."

Thinking about contemporary designers I really admire the work of both Mathieu Lehanneur and Nendo - their work is different and I have a very different reaction to each of them.

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Anything can be an influence, sometimes I think the people that influence me the most are the craftsmen that I meet and work with.

What inspires you?

Craftsmen, materials, techniques. I love seeing the transformation of material; how you can transform a medium from one state to another, change it's shape, all through technique. It's not just craft techniques that inspire me; industrial techniques and the new digital fabrication techniques are just as inspiring.

Why did you decide to become a designer?

I wasn't someone who designed and built stuff as a kid. I loved going to factories, and visiting artisans and craftsmen; I was always curious, but I wasn't a "born designer". By the time I finished high school however I knew was going to study design, I didn't think about it for more than a minute. I just knew.

Where did you study? Train? Work?

I studied at Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA) in Beirut and ENSAAMA-Olivier de Serres in Paris. I worked for less than a year at Centdegrés agency in Paris and then I came back to Beirut in 2004 to open my design firm, and teach at ALBA.

You've worn many hats as a designer, can you elaborate on your trajectory a little bit?

When I started studying at ALBA I was studying interior architecture but soon realized I liked furniture design, so decided to double major. Towards the end of my degree I was becoming very interested in product design. Once I started working, I realized that there was more to design than interiors and products. I was really interested in brands. Through my firm I did brand development; I worked on graphics, packaging, merchandising, commercial architecture, everything that needed to be sold, everything that needed to be designed. By 2008, I was feeling very drawn to architecture and opened an architecture firm with my former associate. Earlier this year, I withdrew from the firm as I am being pulled into other design disciplines. Today, I am very excited by surface design, user experience, and social impact. Perhaps it's because of my involvement with academia, I have to see design as a discipline that is much bigger than just chairs and lamps. I also just really love to do different things.

What are you working on now?

What takes most of my time now is designing new ways of teaching design in Lebanon. [Baroud has been the director of the design department at ALBA since 2012]. You need to map everything out to understand how and what to teach: Who are the actors? What are the opportunities? Who are the stakeholders? It's a design project. That's why I love it so much, I really approach teaching as a design project.

I'm still trying to do some furniture and object design for different exhibitions, galleries, and design fairs. I take on interior architecture projects as well, but only a couple a year. I don't do any residential projects anymore - I like to work with organizations that need something new and will make me think. For example right now I'm working on a space for kids to go to after school. We need to design areas for workshops, plays, a theatre and so on. It's a really interesting project - I don't like projects where I am replicating something I've already created.

I've also been working on a design startup that will use digital manufacturing to customize and greatly improve product performance. For example, if you were buying glasses- you take a picture of your face, we have an algorithm that transforms that photo into a 3-D model, and then you can see exactly how the glasses look on you, and we can customize the glasses just for you. We will be launching next year.

Describe a typical day in the studio.

(Laughing) Phone, phone, phone. Skype. Phone, phone, phone, phone. Maybe 30 minutes of drawing in my sketchbook. Phone.

But to be serious, I never spend a whole day in the studio. There's a lot of time spent in traffic, going

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OF TODAY DESIGNER
MARC BAROUD

NOV 20, 2015

from craftsman to craftsman, meet other collaborators, going to ALBA, and going to the studio. Sometimes I really miss the time when I used to spend the whole day in the studio, I think the last time that happened was 4 years ago. But to be honest I don't know which is better or worse.

How would you describe your work in three adjectives?

How I feel about my work or how I feel others perceive my my work?

How do you feel about your work?

Never satisfied. It's quite an exhausting feeling.

What about how others perceive your work?

It's different from one object to another, but often I don't understand them!

When I create an object I'm really testing the process. And I'm usually testing up until 3 days before the work needs to be shown, perhaps that why I'm rarely satisfied with it, because I haven't given myself enough time to live with it as a finished piece. In my mind it's a prototype, I'm usually very happy with the process, but skeptical when people tell me they like the finished product!

Vault for example, was initially intended to be finished in chrome. When I received the mold in fiberglass I found the colors of the fiberglass really interesting and asked the fabricator to polish it, and then I asked him to make 13 more exactly like the polished mold!

What excites you about the future of design?

The past is a very good mirror of the future. Today everybody wants DIY and to produce things without a huge carbon impact. They don't want to manufacture in China and then import to their local markets. And that's how it was before. In the past, you would never go to a designer 10,000 miles away from you. You would go to the carpenter who was close by, and he would execute your vision. We are coming back to that. We haven't really invented anything, it's just the environment that is changing and we, as designers, have to observe and adapt.

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