Furniture Designer: Collector, Deconstructor, Maker, Story-teller

Introduction

At the start of their careers, independent furniture designers often do not have the opportunity to receive design briefs from manufacturers - they have to first win their attention and trust. This means that the independent designer has to come up with his own design brief, or in the case of collaboration with a group of designers, decide on a common topic, before embarking on designing and making.

Analyzing existing product lines and market trends would seem like the right thing to do, but that does not always work. Furniture manufacturers are often looking for products that they do not already have, and good companies aim to set new trends, rather than follow them. So the conundrum is - how does a designer create a piece of furniture that is conceptually interesting, well-crafted and at the same time true to his/her personal style or philosophy?

Course Summary

The aim of this Studio is to help students find their own voice to answer the formerly mentioned question, through collaborative learning and individual craftsmanship.

The Studio will let students understand and experience the start-to-finish creative and hands-on process of an independent furniture designer. Students are not given a design brief at the start but a set of group exercises and activities to undertake. These activities, and the introduction of three different approaches to furniture design, will aid each student in developing his own design brief. Students will then embark on designing their individual piece of furniture through sketches and the making of scaled models, before proceeding to full-scale mock-ups and production drawings. Finally, students will make and complete a 1:1 final prototype using the workshop facilities at U. of Oregon. As the role of image-making is becoming equally important to product-making today, the last part of the course will focus on helping students to effectively communicate the story behind their designs through the art direction of photography.

Methods

This Studio champions the approach of the collection, observation and deconstruction of found objects as a starting point for design. The appreciation and collection of objects has been used by design master Enzo Mari, as well as contemporary stalwarts Naoto Fukasawa and Sam Hecht as a useful source of inspiration. What a designer collects is also a reflection of himself, some may take to intriguing forms,
and some to understated objects whose cleverness are often overlooked, while others move towards structural, more technical objects. By observing, touching, and deconstructing an object or furniture, students learn about details and construction, as well as assembly, in a hands-on way. After students have gone through the three steps of finding, observing and deconstructing their chosen objects, they can then formulate their design brief based on three design approaches: *reinterpretation* - redesigning and updating the selected object for today's user and aesthetic context; *dialogue* - creating a visual dialogue or user-relation between the found object and the designed object; and *stealing* - the incorporation of a detail of the selected object into a different product typology.

The Studio will also introduce the fundamentals of wood working, with lectures explaining the different types of traditional wood joints, as well as the innovations in the field of furniture design with respect to material application and combinations.

Pregnant Chair by Trent Jansen, an example of *dialogue*
Clip Chair by Osko Deichmann, inspired by foldable Bulgarian basket, an example of steal

Useful References
Enzo Mari's 60 Paperweights

Julien Renault's Inventory
http://julienrenaultobjects.com/en/Inventory.html
http://www.sightunseen.com/2012/02/julien-renault-on-found-by-james/

Jasper Morrison and Naoto Fukasawa's Supernormal
http://www.metropolismag.com/story/20090318/in-praise-of-the-supernormal
http://aaronbasilnelson.com/super-normal

Form Magazine - Importance of Image-Making and Media Literacy
http://www.formmagazine.com/en/previous_articles/how_savvy_is_your_sofa_.aspx
Instructor's Bio

Gabriel Tan graduated with a Bachelor in Industrial Design from the National University of Singapore in 2007. Since then, he has worked in the offices of Lunar Design and Fitch Design, and is currently an adjunct lecturer at LASALLE College of the Arts and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts in Singapore.

Together with three other like-minded designers, he formed the multi-cultural design collective Outofstock in 2007. They work across the fields of furniture, product and interior design from studios in Singapore and Barcelona. Outofstock's clients include Ligne Roset, SAAZS, Environment, Discipline, Foundry, Bolia and their works have been exhibited at London Design Week, the Milan Furniture Fair, Maison & Objet Paris and IMM Cologne. Outofstock was awarded Elle Decoration Spain's Young Talent of The Year in 2009, and the Singapore President's Design Award - Design of The Year in 2010. For more information, visit www.outofstockdesign.com

Hues Tables, manufactured by Ligne Roset
Biscuit Stool, manufactured by Environment

Glide Chair, manufactured by Foundry