



Furniture Aesthetics

Furniture, more than green

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A few months ago, thanks to online social media communities, the story of a 33-year-old female teacher at Fudan University facing advanced breast cancer bone metastasis has touched millions of hearts. It is no easy for any young scholar to catch the eye of so many amidst the deluge of nonsense messages we are continually inundated with. But her blog entitled "Cancer Diary" caused millions in China to step back for a moment and ponder their existence in this modern "fast food" society.

Many caring friends completed her "Cancer Diary" and some selections from it have been widely reproduced across the Internet. In her blog, there is much joy and amusement so one can hardly believe that lying behind the lovely words was a dying woman. As a person engaged in the furniture industry, my attention was fixed on her February 2, 2011 journal - "Why did I get cancer - reason 5". In her "non-professional" self-reflection analysis, furniture was reflected as one of the eight reasons for her cancer.



"To our surprise, in 2009, he (Editor's note: He refers to the patient's husband studying new anti-formaldehyde materials) began to study the activated carbon nano-particles. In an occasional experiment, he opened a formaldehyde tester and found the index appointing 0.87 on the screen, while in general, higher than 0.08 is already dangerous to human bodies".

In other words, cheap furniture constructed with cheap materials is killing us.

Let's analyze how furniture relates to her cancer; one's couches and office furniture play a really close role in one's daily life - no matter if at home or work. Unfortunately, very few people have enough knowledge about furniture even though Chinese take pride in that generations of clever Chinese craftsmen have skillfully created some of the world's admired items, especially during the Ming dynasty.

Traditional Chinese furniture is elegant design from pure wood though modern Chinese home furnishings have changed to a wide range of materials. An exhibition at China Pavilion during Expo2010 Shanghai reflected the changes of "home" after the opening-up policy, but who can explain the furniture itself behind the splendid "variety"? If you make a simple subtraction to a piece of furniture, it'll be no more than wood, metal, plastic, foam, glass, rubber, fabric, leather, bamboo and rattan. For ancient people, solid wood is truly good material, especially mahogany hardwood. But with the reduction of raw materials and increasing demands, the market is bound to absorb new blood. A good education is also needed.

Unfortunately, not all companies produce their furniture honestly. Any above-mentioned material can become a source of pollution in your living or working spaces, e.g. the glue in plywood, plating material, poor-quality foam, fabrics or leather dyed by heavy metals can chronically harm us and our family's health. The danger these can bring is far more than the easily-measured formaldehyde. Even if you read this and decide to replace all the furniture at home, then you may cause secondary pollution - the burning of the abandoned trash will release the toxic dioxins into the air and continue to endanger our living environment. Those business entities are doubtfully very short-sighted!

However, there are a certain amount of respected companies. They are determined to manufacture products from safe materials that can create better life to consumers and so do their best in each step during production. If everyone took the position to think of how much it could add joy and comfort to consumers and even their furniture items might be treated as a family heirloom and pass from generation to generation, those immoral "interests" will be pale. Quality does not end up on the trash heap and comes from pure materials.

Well-designed furniture can convey beauty and advocate simplicity. In ancient Greece, the philosophers and politicians started to worship the concept of simplicity, functionalism and anything that relates to beauty. Aristotle believed that "For as the goodness and excellence of a piper or a sculptor, or the practice of any art, and generally of those who have any function of business to do, lie in that function". He defined virtue through beauty and function. In short, "function before fashion."

Western culture is heavily influenced by the ancient Greek civilization and people select furniture carefully since it might be the biggest investment for their home decoration. For people who pay special attention to the environment and quality of life, furniture can represent their characters, temperament and their own culture heritage. In using it, it can bring you comfort and warmth, without it, it can be pieces of sculpture that light up your living space and bring visual pleasure. "Green" is prerequisite to achieving all these values, without it, any additional functionality and aesthetics will become negligible.

Let us take joy in the way that teacher touched so many lives and let us aspire to live in our environments and communities like splendid flowers!



Interview

Niels Gammelgaard, independent industrial designer

You have a long design career. How has your work evolved since your early career?

When I entered the royal academy of fine arts for the first time in 1965, I experienced a whole new world studying together with painters, sculptures and architects. It was a great choice - a whole world was opening up for me.

Before that I was raised in a middle-class family of two doctors and two older brothers and a sister. My father came from a background of farmers but in my mother's family, there was an artist who she saw I was very handy, creative and bright. She encouraged for me to be an architect. I am very satisfied with her choice and now every day I have worked since, I have enjoyed my work.

I have never been employed by anybody; I started before my graduation in my own design office to build houses, factories and other designs. My great interest was industrial designs.

How are you inspired by your past like studying under Eric Herlew and the culture of your native land?

Erik Herlöv who was my professor for 3 year were a great inspiration, he was the first industrial designer in Denmark, educated by the American Raymond Loewy, the greatest of them all.

In Denmark we were at that time educated with values of modernism and handy craft in furniture made by cabinet makers and designed by architects like Arne Jacobsen, Hans Wegner, Børge Mogensen, Finn Juhl and Kåre Klint.

My generation started working with new materials and new production techniques. Injection molded plastic, aluminum, foam etc.

What influences affected your designs most over the years?

Gustav Eiffel was a big eye opener for me in my study and ever since.

Also, the Bauhaus school in Germany with Walther Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright in USA and Le Corbusier in France all formed impressions that are still the very bottom of my inspiration. Even after my 35th year working, I still always come back to this ballast and work with that in my designs.

Your furniture designs are famous but you are also well known for other product designs as well. How has the emphasis you place on furniture design influenced how you design other products?

For me furniture is a part, a very important part, of the private as well as the public environment, but also any other tool used by human beings is important, therefore I have worked and will work with that.

How does "do good" define your design work?

I have been trying to produce good stuff for normal people - cheaper and in much bigger scale than the old architects did.

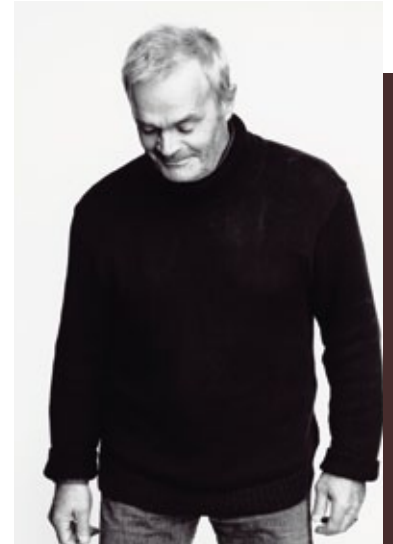
I am very proud, looking back, at having succeeded with a number of designs that have been sold and still sell after all these years. It is because they are not trendy but they have the classic values to look fresh and "new" year after year, some even after more than 30 years.

From such a full design career, what insights have you developed?

I dislike all trendy designs because they are trends and therefore live a very short time. They do not have the basic values in function, in proportions, in materials and in appearance.

At time passes, they look old and describe their time period. True design is timeless.

How do you define your partnership with Woodmark and what does it mean to you?



Niels Gammelgaard, industrial designer

The relationship with Woodmark can be traced back to 1990 when I designed OASE for Erik Jorgensen and Arne Christiansen (Woodmark) was producing it in the following years for the Australian market. In 1996, Woodmark started to produce DUBA IQ series under license. When Arne and I were traveling to all major cities for product promotion, we were making good business and also became friends.

Later in 2007, Arne wanted to produce some sofas that I already had in production in Europe, like Justus, Viola and Jacob, but we felt we were missing a modern updated OASE. I designed Kurve, based on OASE's collaboration system with build-in wire management, screens for privacy, touch-down workspaces etc.

The cooperation with Woodmark is based on mutual trust and the decision making cycle is very short because it is a private company.

What is next for you?

There is so much bad design in the world, I want to change a part of that with my designs.

Brand News

Woodmark standard finishes binder updates



In July 2011, Woodmark China has announced its new finishes binder collection. We maintain our standard of selecting high-performance upholstery materials and always try to keep up with the world's color trends. We have added Global, Neo, Steelcut Trio, Milano and Scandinavian and discontinued Como and Elmosoft leather. The new binder will include items below:

Fabric

Category A: Drift, Edge, Stella, Global, Globe, Atlantic, Flex

Category B: Neo, Fame, Kvadrat Inspiration Card collection

Category C: Divina3, Magenta2, Hallingdal, Steelcut Trio

Leather

Category A-L: Milano

Category B-L: Alto

Category C-L: Scandinavian

Table-Top

Veneer: Walnut, Beech, Maple, Oak

Laminate: Black, Frosty White, Fashion Grey

Glass: Clear, Frost Light

New trends pop at “2011 Saturday in Design”

Since the first “Saturday in Design” in 2003, the event has been a leading forum in Australia for premium manufacturers to launch new trends in furniture, finishes, fixtures and lighting. This year's event attracted over 6,000 visitors from the country's design community. During the event, Woodmark along with Zenith featured its new designs - Boomerang table and Pop chair series by Niels Gammelgaard. These two ranges have hundreds of combinations and give freedom to interior designers for specifications to match their creativity. “It was a fantastic day! We enjoyed a great opportunity in meeting about 2,000 designers and architects,” said Arne Christiansen. The most exciting news is that Woodmark plans to launch these two new series in China by the end of 2011! Please stay tuned...



Case Study

“The concept was to create a clean, contemporary and progressive environment that reflects the values of the business. NAB's brand belief is communicated through the tagline ‘nab, a little word for a big life’. The ‘little word’ could be a gesture, an idea or even a conversation that ultimately makes a big difference to how customers navigate through their own ‘big life’ full of challenges and opportunities.

Our response and approach to this was a slick white back drop for little accents and gestures of color and form, creating a somewhat unexpected interior in a space like typical banking institutions. We achieved this through the use of ad-hoc furniture, bespoke fixtures and joinery, and custom made broadloom carpets.”

---Simon Park, Design Director of PDM

Project name: National Australian Bank

Location: Shanghai, China

Interior design: PDM, China

Woodmark Product: No5 Chair, Armstrong Bench, CP1 Coffee Table, Flosion Stool, Flosion Table

